



1961

# The Ethical Theory of Charles L. Stevenson: His Problem and Solution

Leo Peter Cachat

*Loyola University Chicago*

## Recommended Citation

Cachat, Leo Peter, "The Ethical Theory of Charles L. Stevenson: His Problem and Solution" (1961). *Master's Theses*. Paper 1552.  
[http://ecommons.luc.edu/luc\\_theses/1552](http://ecommons.luc.edu/luc_theses/1552)

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Theses and Dissertations at Loyola eCommons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Master's Theses by an authorized administrator of Loyola eCommons. For more information, please contact [ecommons@luc.edu](mailto:ecommons@luc.edu).



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/).  
Copyright © 1961 Leo Peter Cachat

THE ETHICAL THEORY OF CHARLES L. STEVENSON  
HIS PROBLEM AND SOLUTION

by

Leo P. Caohat, S. J.

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School  
of Loyola University in Partial Fulfillment of  
the Requirements for the Degree of  
Master of Arts

FEBRUARY

1961

## LIFE

Leo Peter Cachat was born in Cleveland, Ohio, April 27, 1933.

He was graduated from St. Ignatius High School, Cleveland, Ohio, in June 1951. He spent three years, 1951-1954, studying pre-medicine at John Carroll University, Cleveland, Ohio. He entered the Society of Jesus in September, 1954 and attended the Milford Novitiate College (Milford, Ohio) of Xavier University from 1954 to 1958. He received a Bachelor of Literature degree from Xavier University in August, 1958. He transferred to the West Baden College of Loyola University in August of 1958 and followed graduate courses in philosophy until August, 1960.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

### Chapter

Page

### I. THE MAN AND HIS MILIEU. . . . . 1

A biographical sketch: its need, the sketch--The philosophical environment of his times: need to view environmental context, the main philosophical current, the reaction to it and Stevenson's connection with this reaction--The modern conception of ethics--Summary.

### II. STEVENSON'S ETHICAL THEORY IN SUMMARY FORM. . . . . 13

Stevenson's method: its origin, the method itself--Summary of theory: central question, working models, meaning, first pattern analysis, persuasion, validity, intrinsic and extrinsic value, second pattern of analysis, related theories, avoidability, practical implication--Summary.

### III. THE CORE ISSUE. . . . . 36

Purpose of the chapter: need to present core issue--Highpoints of Stevenson's theory: interpersonal-personal, dispute-conflict, disagreement-agreement, attitude-belief, emotive-descriptive meaning, ethics-science--Conclusions to be drawn: Keynote of Stevenson's position, stress on interpersonal-problems and the distinction between attitudes and beliefs--Attitude and Belief: the nature of attitudes, the nature of beliefs--Core Problem: its answer is the distinction between attitude and belief, what is the problem? what is the difference between a factual statement and an ethical statement? Hume, his theory of morals, similarities to Stevenson's theory, problem of 'Is' to 'Ought', Moore's influence--Conclusion: what has been done, what will be done.

### IV. AN EVALUATION AND COMMENTS. . . . . 52

The logical problem: its nature, validity of distinction between factual and ethical, Stevenson's answer to the problem, a critique of Stevenson's answer, relation of factual to ethical, meaning@ descriptive and emotive, attitude and belief--Summary of the logical problem--Presuppositions of problem--Conclusion--The epistemological-psychological problem: distinction between ethics

and science--Stevenson's epistemology: connection of ethics and epistemology, linked with Hume, Stevenson's theory of meaning, criticism of the theory of meaning, Stevenson's proviso--A further comment: another solution to agreement and disagreement--Conclusion.

BIBLIOGRAPHY. . . . . 72

## CHAPTER I

### THE MAN AND HIS MILIEU

To most readers the name Charles Leslie Stevenson will mean very little. The two most obvious reasons for this lack of familiarity are, first of all, the fact that Stevenson is a contemporary, and secondly, his limitation of the majority of his scholarly work to meta-ethical questions. Wherefore, a brief introduction will be in order.

Such an introduction must present the man, his milieu, and the man in his milieu. We shall begin by introducing Prof. Stevenson in his individual and personal capacity. Next we shall consider the philosophical milieu that was and is a main factor in the development of his ethical theory. Finally, we shall consider Prof. Stevenson's position and influence in that milieu.

Charles Leslie Stevenson is professor of philosophy at the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor. He was born June 27, 1908. In 1930 he received his A. B. from Yale. Along with his newly-wedded wife he sailed to England to study at Cambridge receiving his B. A. in 1933. He returned to America and received his Ph. D. from Harvard in 1935. He remained at Harvard as an assistant and then as an instructor in philosophy until 1939. It was during this stay at Harvard that his significant articles on the "emotive theory" of meta-ethical analysis appeared in Mind.

The years from 1939 to 1945 saw Prof. Stevenson assume the role of assistant professor of philosophy at Yale. These were fruitful years which culminated in Prof. Stevenson's major work, Ethics and Language. In 1945 he held a Guggenheim Fellowship and then went to the University of Michigan where he assumed the post of associate professor of philosophy. In 1948 he was made full professor.

This brief biographical sketch gives a very inadequate picture of Prof. Stevenson. It needs to be put into the fuller context of Stevenson's philosophical environment, because without the proper perspective Stevenson's particular problem may appear strange, unimportant, or even meaningless. He is in a particular philosophic stream, the analytical, and unless we consider this fact we shall understand neither his problem nor his method.

One philosophic current, or rather, a mere eddy at that time, in which Stevenson found himself when he went to Yale in the late 1920's was the anti-idealistic, anti-rationalistic movement that G. E. Moore had set in motion when he called idealism into question in 1903. The idealistic, rationalistic doctrine and method that desired to give a total explanation of all reality, a world view, was first doubted and finally totally and completely rejected. Such rejection budded forth in the philosophical writings of Moore and Bertrand Russell and passed on to Ludwig Wittgenstein, to the logical positivists, and finally made itself felt in the thought of American realists. The non-idealists denied that philosophy must construct a world view that encompasses and illuminates science, art, morals, religion, and politics.<sup>1</sup> In this context of revolt

---

<sup>1</sup>See Morton Gabriel White, The Age of Analysis (Boston, 1955).

against the universal system, the Weltansicht, Stevenson began his philosophical studies.

This revolt against idealism embraces three distinct movements in the philosophical world: Cambridge analysis, logical positivism, and pragmatism. The Cambridge analysis movement, also known as the British analytic or the ordinary language school, grew out of the meticulous analysis practised without resort to formalism by G. E. Moore over several decades. It was further inspired by the work of Ludwig Wittgenstein, whose Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus had played a large part in the growth of positivism, but who increasingly began to look at concepts not in terms of their definition or their individually ascertainable meaning, but in terms of the way their use showed up in everyday language.<sup>2</sup> The analytic school, if we may use the term (the analysts themselves would deny that they formed a school), like the other two mentioned, pays little attention to any all inclusive systems, but concentrates on the task of clarifying the issues raised in philosophical discussion.

Logical positivism is the continental school of analysis originally known as the Vienna Circle. It is the movement of philosopher-scientists which attempts to wed philosophy to science. Wittgenstein's presence at Cambridge brought the Cambridge analytic school into contact with the logical positivism of the continent. Although logical positivism never has had much influence in

---

<sup>2</sup>Wittgenstein originally was very much influenced by Bertrand Russell's mathematics and logic, but after 1920 his interest shifted more and more away from formal logic and the exact sciences to the data of ordinary language. See Contemporary Philosophy, ed. James L. Jarrett and Sterling M. McMurrin (New York, 1954), pp. 83-84.



England, Englishmen such as A. J. Ayer who studied in Vienna have brought it home to England and consequently have served to point out the common ground of logical positivism and Cambridge analysis. Both have had a common ground in their rejection of the traditional conception of philosophy as a concern for the ultimate nature of reality. They have found general agreement in their empiricism, their eschewing of metaphysics, their aggressive respect for science, and in their pursuit of analysis in the interest of the clarification of thought. But they differ in other respects. British analysis has largely followed the pattern laid down by Moore of seeking indubitable grounds in sense data for that which is known to the "man in the street" by common place methods, and has refused to identify philosophy, its program and method, with the sciences to the extent to which this is done in positivism and pragmatism.

The third movement is basically American. Pragmatism is often indiscriminately lumped with logical positivism under the pejorative title "Scientism," and, of course, there are many bonds that link pragmatism to logical positivism. Not a few thinkers of our times have a foot in each camp. (Stevenson himself might be numbered among these.) Pragmatism's traditional empiricism, its respect for science, and skeptical attitude toward metaphysical discussions have made it a close relative of European analytic philosophy. "And, like British analytical philosophy and Logical Positivism, its rise has been within a context of polemic against Idealism, Absolutism, and speculative philosophy in general."<sup>3</sup> It does differ from analytic philosophy, however, in the amount of

---

<sup>3</sup>Contemporary Philosophy, ed. James L. Jarrett and Sterling M. McMurrin (New York, 1954), p. 365.

admiration that it offers science. We shall see that it is on this particular point that Prof. Stevenson differs from Dewey.

These were the main influences that molded Prof. Stevenson's thinking in the development of his ethical theory. From 1930 to 1933 while he was at Cambridge, he came in contact with the analytical movement. He carried this influence with him when he returned to do doctorate studies at Harvard. Although the analytical movement was practically non-existent in America, Stevenson continued to think along these lines. Publications coming from England, such as Mind, and A. J. Ayer's work, Language, Truth and Logic, which first appeared in 1936, kept him thinking in this framework. Shortly after the publication of Language, Truth and Logic, Stevenson came to print with his Mind articles which show a close parallel to Ayer's ethical position.<sup>4</sup>

An important influence in the formation of Stevenson's ethical theory was Ralph Barton Perry. Perry's General Theory of Value appeared in 1926. At the time Stevenson was doing doctoral studies at Harvard, Perry still was on the staff. Since Perry was a naturalist, Stevenson imbued with Cambridge's G. E. Moore and talk of Moore's "naturalistic fallacy," would find points of contrast between Perry and Moore. Such contrast would stimulate the intellectually alert Stevenson to an analysis and evaluation of both positions. For this reason we find the influence of both Moore and Perry in Ethics and Language.

---

<sup>4</sup> Alfred Jules Ayer, Language, Truth and Logic (London, 1936), p. 107. "We begin by admitting that the fundamental ethical concepts are unanalysable . . . Ayer explains this fact "by a certain feeling in the speaker." Stevenson, likewise, would explain this fact by emotive meaning. There are also other examples."

The pragmatic strain is the easiest to find and the easiest to verify in Prof. Stevenson's writings. Time after time Stevenson points to John Dewey's influence on his conception of ethics. "My conception of a personal decision will not be new: I shall borrow most of it from John Dewey . . . ," Stevenson admits.<sup>5</sup> This pragmatic influence founded on the writings of Dewey made its appearance after the Mind articles.<sup>6</sup> Stevenson's views on the subject of ethics underwent certain changes from the time his articles appeared in Mind until Ethics and Language. Aiken points out that one of two changes was the influence of Dewey's ethical philosophy.<sup>7</sup> The view of Dewey which made itself felt in Ethics and Language is the now familiar doctrine that "ends-in-view" are never really understood or properly evaluated apart from an understanding and evaluation of their means.

Having dealt with the philosophic theory and practice in general during Stevenson's formative years as a philosopher, we must examine the contemporary conception of ethics because it has influenced Stevenson and has been influenced by him and therefore offers the best background against which to view Stevenson's position. For Stevenson there are at least two distinctions to make in speaking of ethics. First is the distinction between a broad sense of the term, which would include any evaluative decision, and the narrow sense of the

---

<sup>5</sup>Charles L. Stevenson, "The Emotive Conception of Ethics and Its Cognitive Implications," The Philosophical Review, LIX (July 1950), p. 291.

<sup>6</sup>Stevenson published three articles on his ethical theory: January 1937 (XLVI, 14-31), January 1938 (XLVII, 45-57), July 1938 (XLVII, 331-350).

<sup>7</sup>Henry David Aiken, "Ethics and Language," The Journal of Philosophy, XLII (August 16, 1945), p. 456.

term, which includes only that evaluative decision involving peculiarly moral attitudes. "When we act in accordance with a peculiarly moral approval, we have a secondary approval, so to speak, which makes us proud to recognize our primary one."<sup>8</sup>

Much more important, however, is the distinction between normative ethics and meta-ethics. The contemporary moral philosopher finds it convenient to divide ethics into two parts: (1) normative ethics, which asks what things or actions are good, right, etc., and consists of ethical judgments proper, i.e., judgments of value and of obligation, (2) ethical theory or meta-ethics, which asks such questions as: "What is the meaning of the term 'good,' 'right,' 'wrong,' etc.?" and consists not of ethical judgments, but of such logical, epistemological, or ontological statements as "Good means desire." Ayer points out that ethical ". . . theory is entirely on the level of analysis; it is an attempt to show what people are doing when they make moral judgments . . . . All moral theories, intuitionist, naturalistic, objectivist, emotive, and the rest, in so far as they are philosophical theories, are neutral as regards actual conduct. To speak technically, they belong to the field of meta-ethics, not to ethics proper."<sup>9</sup> Thus the relation of analytic to normative ethics may be compared to the way an ability to describe the rules of a game of chess stands to an ability actually to play the game. The rules of the game do not tell what move one should make at any specific point in an actual game; nor does an exposition of the logic of ethical concepts tell one how to behave in

---

<sup>8</sup>"The Emotive Conception of Ethics and Its Cognitive Implications," p. 294.

<sup>9</sup>Alfred Jules Ayer, *Philosophical Essays* (London, 1954), pp. 245-246.

any actual situation.

A meta-ethics, then, is any theory which attempts to define or to describe the way or ways in which moral judgments are actually used by human beings. These theories are generally considered to be of four types. Edwards breaks them down into intuitionism, objective naturalism, naive subjectivism, and emotive theories.<sup>10</sup> John Hospers breaks them down into objectivistic and subjectivistic naturalistic theories, the unique property theory and the emotive theory.<sup>11</sup>

We shall consider the naturalistic theories first. The objectivistic theory maintains that since "X is good" is of the same grammatical form as "X is round," then goodness is like roundness, and the word 'good' names an objective property of X just as 'round' does--an ethical property in the one case, a geometrical property in the other.

According to all subjectivistic theories, when one says that "X is good," he is not saying that it has a certain objective property; he is only saying that he (or someone else) has a certain attitude toward X.

G. E. Moore is the principal advocate of the unique property theory. In his Principia Ethica (pages 9-10) Moore points out that 'good' is an indefinable word, standing for a property which is not analyzable into other properties. 'Good' is neither verbally nor ostensively definable. Thus Moore formulated his famous "naturalistic fallacy," the fallacy of believing that goodness

---

<sup>10</sup>Paul Edwards, The Logic of Moral Discourse (Glencoe, Ill., 1955).

<sup>11</sup>John Hospers, An Introduction to Philosophical Analysis (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1953), p. 455 ff.

is analysable into non-ethical terms or natural properties.

The formulations of the emotive theory are many, but they all agree at least in this, that all other theories err in attributing to ethical terms a purely cognitive (sometimes the word used is "descriptive") meaning, and therefore fail to recognize that ethical words are likewise emotive in their meaning. The emotivists agree with Moore that ethical terms are basically unanalyzable. Moore explains the unanalyzability of ethical terms by means of some unique property, such as the property to produce happiness. Therefore 'good' is a word standing for this unique property of producing happiness and cannot be analyzed so that it stands for any other property. The same is true for all other ethical terms. The emotivist, however, explains the unanalyzability of ethical terms by pointing to their emotive meaning. The meaning of an ethical term is emotive. It cannot, therefore, be analyzed so that it stands for any property or characteristic of things, that is, for anything cognitive. 'Good' has no cognitive meaning, but merely emotive. It is analysable in terms of the emotion of approval and that is all.

Before concluding this chapter by briefly indicating Prof. Stevenson's task in his ethical writings and theorizing, a short summary synthesizing the diverse elements that have influenced Prof. Stevenson is needed. The main stream of philosophical thinking in which Stevenson found himself when he was graduated from Yale in 1930 surged with revolt against the Absolute and the Universal of the Idealists. The exact sciences had entered the philosophical arena through the influence of Bertrand Russell, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Moritz Schlick, and the Vienna Circle. Philosophers took over from the scientists the principle of verification and set up different criteria to determine when a

philosophical statement is verified. In its beginnings, the Vienna Circle demanded that a philosophical statement be empirically verifiable to have meaning.

Whereas the philosophical trend prior to Stevenson's arrival at Yale was centered predominantly around the synthesis of reality and the explanation of its totality, so a new trend arose with the analytic philosophers and centered upon an analysis of reality and an explanation of its parts. Just as the main task of the scientist was to analyze and delve deeper and deeper into the parts of reality such as the atom, the parts of the atom, and the parts of the parts of the atom, so the main task of the philosopher also became one of analysis.

By the time that Prof. Stevenson had gained his B. A. at Cambridge, G. E. Moore's ordinary language approach was far more influential on Stevenson than the formal, methodological approach of the logical positivists. Stevenson returned to Harvard to work on his Ph. D. with Moore's Principia Ethica still fresh in mind. The division of ethics into normative and meta-ethics was established, with Stevenson finding many problems that interested him and that needed answering in the area of meta-ethics. Thus the vast majority of his work circles around the language of ethics as is evident from the title of his doctoral dissertation, The Emotive Meaning of Ethical Terms. In 1937 and 1938 the greater majority of his thoughts on ethics and emotive meaning found its way into Mind.

In these early writings of Stevenson, the logico-analytic influence stands out most clearly. But from 1938 on Prof. Stevenson came into greater contact with pragmatism, especially as taught by John Dewey. Under Dewey's influence Stevenson realized the need to abandon a version of the emotive theory which held that 'good' is a term which functions merely emotively. Although he found

some ethical terms emotive, others he found to be primarily descriptive. Thus along with incorporating Dewey's thoughts on "end-in-view," Prof. Stevenson also modified his version of the emotive theory when he came to present Ethics and Language in 1944.<sup>12</sup>

With this brief summary as background, an examination of Prof. Stevenson's task as ethical writer now presents itself. At the very beginning of his main work, Ethics and Language, Prof. Stevenson points out that this book ". . . deals not with the whole of ethics, but with a narrowly specialized part of it. Its first object is to clarify the meaning of the ethical terms--such terms as 'good,' 'right,' 'just,' 'ought,' and so on. Its second object is to characterize the general methods by which ethical judgments can be proved or supported."<sup>13</sup> Stevenson goes on to point out that his work is related to normative ethics in much the same way that conceptual analysis and scientific method are related to the sciences. Thus he warns others not to expect to find in his book any conclusions about what conduct is right and wrong. The purpose of his study is analytic and methodological. "It hopes to send others to their tasks with clearer heads and less wasteful habits of investigation . . . . The present volume has the limited task of sharpening the tools which others employ."<sup>14</sup>

Perhaps Prof. Stevenson's task appears too limited. To spend all of one's

---

<sup>12</sup>Aiken, "Ethics and Language," develops this change in views more fully.

<sup>13</sup>Charles L. Stevenson, Ethics and Language (New Haven, 1944), p. 1. Hereafter this book will be indicated as EL.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid.



effort on meta-ethical problems might seem to downgrade normative ethics. Stevenson anticipates this charge and points out that normative ethics is important but that to make ethical judgments is not part of the specialized task that he has set himself. He tries to understand what goes on in ethics without making judgments. He goes on to state that if he has not yet ". . . written on these larger, normative problems, that is because I have not gotten that far. But my limited topic is by no means the only one that is "philosophical." I say this to guard against a misunderstanding. So long as I stop short of using the normative terms . . . I may seem to be trying to explain them away. But in fact I take their importance for granted, as any sane man must; and my effort to write on ethics without using them is simply indicative of the specialized nature of my problems."<sup>15</sup>

Such is the man and his milieu; such is the task that he sets himself. In the following chapters we shall attempt to trace Prof. Stevenson's ethical theory. Such a work, of course, will be merely a summary of his thought. But with such a summary we will try to indicate the core issue or problem that lies behind all his theorizing. Finally, in the last chapter, we shall test the theory that Prof. Stevenson presents for intrinsic coherence and verifiability.

---

<sup>15</sup>Charles L. Stevenson, "Brandt's Questions About Emotive Ethics," The Philosophical Review, LIX (Oct. 1950), pp. 529-530.

## CHAPTER II

### STEVENSON'S ETHICAL THEORY IN SUMMARY FORM

This chapter looks first to the methodology Stevenson employs and then to the theory which flows from it. The investigation of Stevenson's methodology begins with a discussion of its origin and leads into a presentation of the methodology itself. The consideration of Stevenson's theory, which covers the greater part of the chapter, is a summary of the position contained in Ethics and Language.

Due to the fact that Prof. Stevenson's ethical theory is intrinsically connected with his methodology, an understanding of his theory demands a prior understanding of his methodology. Since he is in the logico-analytic philosophical background, as was shown in the last chapter, Stevenson's method obviously partakes of that environmental influence. His main interest, like that of G. E. Moore, lies in investigating neither the truth nor the meaning of statements of ordinary life, which as such he believes to have a well-known meaning and to be in many cases certainly true, but in giving an analysis of their meaning.<sup>1</sup>

This interest of Stevenson merely echoes the analyst's conception of the philosopher's job. A. J. Ayer has stated that "it should now be sufficiently clear that if the philosopher is to uphold his claim to make a special contribution to the stock of our knowledge, he must not attempt to formulate speculative

---

<sup>1</sup>Alan R. White, G. E. Moore: A Critical Exposition (Oxford, 1958), p. 3.

truths, or to look for first principles, or to make a priori judgments about the validity of our empirical beliefs. He must, in fact, confine himself to works of clarification and analysis, of a sort which we shall presently describe."<sup>2</sup>

Stevenson's subject matter is ethical discourse. His method is analysis. He points out this fact when he writes that "I am not using ethical terms, but am indicating how they are used."<sup>3</sup> His analysis has a twofold purpose: (1) to clarify meaning, (2) to characterize the general methods by which ethical judgments can be proved or supported.<sup>4</sup> Thus besides merely seeking to clarify the meaning of ethical terms, Prof. Stevenson ". . . seeks to give full attention to ethical methodology, emphasizing the interplay between emotive and descriptive meaning, dispelling any impression that a moralist must be irrational or dogmatic, and indicating the general circumstances under which ethical arguments can be resolved by scientific means."<sup>5</sup>

With this brief preface to what Prof. Stevenson attempts to do in his ethical works and the method that he uses, we can now explain the theory itself. The summary presented, which indicates in a very brief fashion the central points of the more important chapters, will limit itself to Stevenson's theory as contained in Ethics and Language, since it is there he presents his matured and developed thought on the subject of ethics.

---

<sup>2</sup>Language, Truth and Logic, p. 51.

<sup>3</sup>Charles L. Stevenson, "The Emotive Meaning of Ethical Terms," Mind, XLVI (January 1937), p. 20.

<sup>4</sup>EL, p. 1.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., pp. 267-268.

Prof. Stevenson begins his work with a chapter on Kinds of Agreement and Disagreement. "Our first question, though seemingly peripheral, will prove to be of central importance: What is the nature of ethical agreement and disagreement? Is it parallel to that found in the natural sciences, differing only with regard to the relevant subject matter; or is it of some broadly different sort?"<sup>6</sup> He moves on to show that agreement and disagreement are of two types. There is agreement and disagreement in belief and in attitude.

Stevenson goes a <sup>step</sup> further in pointing out that most current conceptions of what makes a normative issue in the ethical arena limit disagreement to that of belief. Such is I. A. Richards' ". . . tacit conception of ethical disagreement. He takes it to be a kind of disagreement in belief."<sup>7</sup> Stevenson holds that ethical disagreement is twofold. This is central to his theory.

When ethical issues become controversial, they involve disagreement that is of a dual nature. There is almost inevitably disagreement in belief, which requires detailed, sensitive attention; but there is also disagreement in attitude. An analysis which seeks a full picture of ethics, in touch with practice, must be careful to recognize both factors, neither emphasizing the former to the exclusion of the latter, nor the latter to the exclusion of the former. Only by this means can it reveal the varied functions of the ethical terms, and make clear how the methods of ethics compare with those of the natural sciences.<sup>8</sup>

Stevenson's conclusions about disagreement prepare the way for a study of

---

<sup>6</sup>EL, p. 2.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 9.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 11.

ethical terms, and the characteristic features of ethical methodology. Thus in the second chapter He deals with ". . . both of these topics, but in a manner that is deliberately oversimplified. In place of a detailed analysis of ethical judgments, it will provide only 'working models' for analysis--definitions which approximate to ethical meanings with sufficient accuracy to be of temporary help."<sup>9</sup>

The chapter deals with definitions and Stevenson makes it clear from the outset that unless the distinction between belief and attitude is maintained, ethics will become a part of science. Science deals with beliefs. Any definition, therefore, which identifies the meaning of ethical terms with that of scientific ones will suggest that the questions of normative ethics, like those of science, give rise to an agreement or disagreement that is exclusively in belief. "In this way, ignoring disagreement in attitude, it will lead to only a half-picture, at best, of the situations in which the ethical terms are actually used."<sup>10</sup> It is necessary to remember that there are ". . . multitudes of familiar cases in which the ethical terms are used in a way that is not exclusively scientific, and we must recognize a meaning which suits them to their additional function."<sup>11</sup>

Stevenson presents a number of working models such as: (1) "This is wrong" means I disapprove of this; do so as well. (2) "This is good" means I approve of this; do so as well.<sup>12</sup> The working models deal with the meaning of

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 20.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 21.

ethical terms. Thus, to avoid confusion, Stevenson points out that "throughout the present chapter . . . and in several of the chapters that follow, the analysis of meanings will emphasize agreement and disagreement in attitude, whereas the analysis of methods will emphasize agreement and disagreement in belief."<sup>13</sup> Although this is the case, Stevenson makes it clear that beliefs have more than an inconsequential, secondary role in ethics. "Such a view is wholly foreign to the present work, and foreign to the most obvious facts of daily experience."<sup>14</sup>

Stevenson turns next to ethical methodology, i.e., the method of resolving ethical disagreement. A possible way of resolution rests in the reasons that can be attached to an ethical judgment. Such a method moves from agreement in belief to agreement in attitude. The oversimplification of the working models necessitates a caution touching language flexibility, that is, Stevenson cautions that meanings are more complicated than the working models indicate. Therefore, the method of resolving disagreement through the medium of reasons is not final. He summarizes his position thus:

The ethical terms cannot be taken as fully comparable to scientific ones. They have a quasi-imperative function which, poorly preserved by the working models, must be explained with careful attention to emotive meaning; and they have a descriptive function which is attended by ambiguity and vagueness, requiring a particularly detailed study of linguistic flexibility. Both of these aspects of language are intimately related to ethical methodology; and although this relationship has as yet been studied only in a partial, imperfect way, enough has been said to suggest an interesting possibility: The reasons which are given for an ethical judgment, although open to the ordinary tests so far as their own truth or falsity is concerned, may give support to the judgment in a way that neither inductive nor deductive logic can exhaustively characterize, and which must therefore become the subject matter of a further type of inquiry.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 23.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 24.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 36.

The flexibility in language as manifested in the working models calls forth a study of language. How are emotive and descriptive meanings related? Before he can discuss this relation, Stevenson must first present his theory of meaning. He conceives meaning as a dispositional property of words, for he finds the notion of disposition (tendency, latent ability) useful in dealing with the complicated causal situations where some specified sort of event is a function of many variables. Meaning offers such a causal situation. "The meaning of a sign . . . is not some specific psychological process that attends the sign at any one time. It is rather a dispositional property of the sign, where the response, varying with varying attendant circumstances, consists of psychological processes in a hearer, and where the stimulus is his hearing the sign."<sup>16</sup> This implies, of course, that the relation between hearing the sign and the reaction to it is an elaborate causal one; dispositional properties "always involve a causal milieu."<sup>17</sup>

After this general discussion of meaning, Stevenson treats emotive meaning and descriptive meaning. "Emotive meaning is a meaning in which the response (from the hearer's point of view) or the stimulus (from the speaker's point of view) is a range of emotions."<sup>18</sup> Descriptive meaning is not as easy to pinpoint. Two questions arise about it:

"(a) What kind of psychological processes is a sign, in virtue of its descriptive meaning, disposed to produce?

---

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 54.

<sup>17</sup>~~Ibid.~~

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 59.

(b) How do descriptive meanings attain the precision that is needed for practicable communication?"<sup>19</sup> To the first of these questions Stevenson answers that a sign's descriptive meaning is its disposition to produce cognitive mental processes. The second question is answered by a consideration of the function of linguistic rules, which relate symbols to each other.<sup>20</sup>

Stevenson proceeds to show the interrelationship of emotive and descriptive meanings, although he admits that at this stage of the analysis such a demonstration is oversimplified. The interrelationship does point out a diversity in emotive meaning; especially important is that of dependent and independent emotive meaning. "To whatever extent emotive meaning is not a function of descriptive meaning, but either persists without the latter or survives changes in it, let us say that it is 'independent.' Thus nonmetaphorical interjections will have a wholly independent emotive meaning, but most words, including 'democracy,' . . . and so on, will have an emotive meaning which is independent only in part. On the other hand, to whatever extent emotive meaning is a function of descriptive meaning, changing with it after only brief 'lag,' let us say that it is 'dependent'."<sup>21</sup>

Finished with his study of language, Stevenson introduces his "First Pattern of Analysis." If we are to take proper account of linguistic flexibility, we must divide our study into two parts, or 'patterns' of analysis. The first

---

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 62.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 68.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., pp. 72-73.



pattern will be simply an extension of the working models of Chapter III. The vagueness of the ethical terms will be removed, as an illustration of one of the possibilities, by limiting their descriptive reference to the speaker's own attitudes."<sup>22</sup>

An example of an ethical term shrouded in vagueness is the term 'good.' As G. E. Moore pointed out, 'good' is unanalyzable and, therefore, indefinable. For a term to be definable it must be analyzable into simpler cognitive meanings which directly or indirectly correspond to natural properties. 'Good' is indefinable, according to Moore, because it cannot be analyzed into simpler cognitive meanings due to the fact that 'good' corresponds to no natural property. Stevenson, however, explains the indefinability of 'good' in terms of its inability to be analyzed into simpler cognitive meaning since the basic meaning of 'good' is emotive. "The term 'good' is indefinable, then, if a definition is expected to preserve its customary emotive meaning. It has no exact emotive equivalent."<sup>23</sup>

'Good' and most ethical terms, nevertheless, have a dual function. "For the contexts that are most typical of normative ethics, the ethical terms have a function that is both emotive and descriptive."<sup>24</sup> The descriptive function because of its flexibility requires attentive consideration. 'Good' can be given a descriptive meaning that is quite complicated. In such a case the des-

---

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 89.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 82.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 84.

criptive meaning can be variously related to the emotive meaning. "A great part of the term's emotive meaning may . . . be dependent on the descriptive meaning, eliciting the hearer's favor only as a consequence of first presenting him with beliefs about qualities that he admires."<sup>25</sup> But if 'good' is given a descriptive meaning that is relatively simple, its more complicated sense may remain in the form of cognitive suggestions. "Much of the emotive meaning may then be quasi-dependent, eliciting the hearer's favor not by definitely designating qualities that he admires, but simply calling them to mind in a vague way."<sup>26</sup> Of course, even when the greater part of the meaning of 'good' is dependent or quasi-dependent, there remains its independent emotive meaning.

Stevenson ends the chapter with a few remarks about ethical naturalism and non-naturalism. He considers himself a naturalist. The non-naturalist, in an effort to escape the peril of Moore's "Naturalistic Fallacy,"<sup>27</sup> maintains that 'good' must be an indefinable quality. As we have seen earlier,<sup>28</sup> Stevenson explains the indefinability of 'good,' not in terms of some non-natural quality, but in terms of emotive meaning. He maintains, therefore, that the "Naturalistic Fallacy" is itself a fallacious argument since it fails to provide a distinction between normative ethics and science. Ethical judgments have a molding influence upon attitudes which scientific facts do not have. An analysis which finds in ethical judgments emotive meaning and the possibility of disagreement in attitude does not fail to distinguish between normative ethics and science.

---

<sup>25</sup>Ibid.

<sup>27</sup>G. E. Moore, Principia Ethica (Cambridge, 1903), p. 9 ff.

<sup>28</sup>See p. 19.

Thus, Stevenson, as an ethical naturalist, can explain the indefinability of an ethical term like 'good' without ". . . multiplying entities beyond necessity. Unless the non-natural quality can be defended on more positive grounds, it must be taken as an invisible shadow cast by confusion and emotive meaning."<sup>29</sup>

Chapter V continues in the framework of the First Pattern Analysis, but instead of considering meaning it deals with the method of resolving ethical disagreement. As with the working models, so in the first pattern, supporting reasons play the major role of resolving ethical disagreement. For the most part the supporting reasons are related to the judgment psychologically rather than logically. "They do not strictly imply the judgment in the way that axioms imply theorems; nor are they related to the judgments inductively, as statements describing observations are related to scientific laws. Rather they support the judgment in the way that reasons support imperatives. They serve to intensify and render more permanent the influence upon attitudes which emotive meaning can often do no more than begin. This is possible whenever attitudes are functions of beliefs."<sup>30</sup>

A number of examples serve to illustrate the modus operandi of these supporting reasons. The examples are divided into four main groups: examples illustrating some of the ways in which (1) ethical methods resemble factual ones, (2) empirical reasons limited to the nature and direct consequences of that which is judged are psychologically related to an ethical judgment, (3) empirical reasons not limited to the nature and direct consequences of that which is judged are psychologically related to an ethical judgment, (4) the forces of a discon-

<sup>29</sup> EL, p. 109.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 113.

certing influence are evaded, or the means by which it is exerted are altered.

An example of the first group is:

A: It would be a good thing to have a dole for the unemployed.

B: But you have just said that a dole would weaken people's sense of independence, and you have admitted that nothing which has that consequence is good.

Stevenson presents several such examples for each group.

After these examples Stevenson spends some time pointing up the parallels between the interpersonal decisions which his analysis has been mainly considering and personal decisions. In the interpersonal aspects of ethical method the supporting reasons have the instrumental task of supporting a view that one person is recommending to another, or of criticizing a view that the other is recommending to him. But personal decisions also have a place in ethical discussions. The interpersonal aspects are of ". . . unquestionable interest, but they are not representative of all ethical reasoning. There are times when a person is faced not with the need of convincing others, or deliberating with them, but rather with a problem of convincing himself."<sup>31</sup>

The need of a personal ethical decision arises from a conflict, "a conflict of attitudes. The individual's attitudes do not speak with one voice, but urge him both this way and that, with the net result of leaving him in a painful and inactive state of irresolution. Conflict and ethical indecision are the same; and indecision is replaced by decision only when conflict is resolved."<sup>32</sup>

---

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., p. 130.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 131.

Thus it can be seen that the personal aspects of ethics are not very different from the interpersonal ones. The former involve conflict; the latter, when they are controversial, involve disagreement in attitude. "Conflict and disagreement in attitude are much the same, since conflict occurs . . . when an individual disagrees in attitude with himself. So the personal aspect of ethics reveal the same opposition within an individual that has previously been seen with a group."<sup>33</sup>

Stevenson closes the chapter with a discussion of "The Degree to Which Ethical Methods Can Approach Finality." If the method is concerned merely with the workings of formal logic, the logic of the method can offer a disproof or provide ". . . necessary conditions to the rational acceptance of normatively interesting ethical judgments, but not sufficient ones."<sup>34</sup> If the supporting reasons are empirical, they too can offer a disproof of the other person's beliefs. Yet this is not to say that absolute certainty can be reached convincing to all. "When a speaker's judgment is supported or attacked by empirical reasons psychologically related to it, it is even more obvious that no exhaustive method convincing to all people under all circumstances, can confidently be hoped for."<sup>35</sup> Granted the assumption that all disagreement in attitude is rooted in disagreement in belief, ethical agreement can be attained.

---

<sup>33</sup>Ibid.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., p. 135.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid.

Yet an assumption that is not fantastic may nevertheless be false, nor have we any trustworthy assurance that it is true. Our conclusions about the finality of rational methods in ethics must accordingly be hypothetical:

If any ethical dispute is rooted in disagreement in belief, it may be settled by reasoning and inquiry to whatever extent the beliefs may be so settled. But if any ethical dispute is not rooted in disagreement in belief, then no reasoned solution of any sort is possible.<sup>36</sup>

In Chapter VI Prof. Stevenson considers the place of persuasion in ethical disputes. The methods to resolve ethical disputes can be of two kinds. Besides the rational methods, which include the supporting reasons already mentioned, there are nonrational methods. One of these nonrational methods, and the most important according to Stevenson although he offers no reasons for its importance, is persuasion. Persuasion ". . . depends on the sheer, direct emotional impact of words--on emotive meaning, rhetorical cadence, apt metaphor, stentorian stimulating, or pleading tones of voice, dramatic gestures, care in establishing rapport with the hearer or audience, and so on."<sup>37</sup> Again a parallel can be made between interpersonal and personal decisions. Whereas persuasion is used in interpersonal decisions, self-persuasion is used in personal decisions.

Prof. Stevenson next treats the problem of validity. He compares validity in ethics with validity in inductive and deductive logic. ". . . when ethics uses the methods of logic or science directly, the ordinary canons of validity remain in full operation. On the other hand, validity has nothing to do with

---

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., p. 138.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., p. 139.

persuasive methods. It is cognitively nonsensical to speak either of 'valid' or of 'invalid' persuasion."<sup>38</sup> Stevenson actually goes on to show that there is no comparison between the two. The step from supporting reasons to an ethical conclusion is utterly different from any found in logic or science, "and cannot expect to be valid in the same way."<sup>39</sup> It is true that wherever an ethical argument is factual, its methodology falls within the widely studied fields of logic and scientific method. But in cases that go beyond these and ". . . use beliefs in their turn to alter attitudes, questions about validity, in any helpful sense of the term, are irrelevant."<sup>40</sup>

Validity is one thing. What method to use in resolving ethical questions is another. The latter question is evaluative. Evaluation is a normative matter. "To evaluate or recommend an ethical method . . . is to moralize about the ways of moralists."<sup>41</sup> This Stevenson tries to avoid. Although an effort to judge ethical methods may be and is of unquestionable importance, Ethics and Language ". . . does not propose to join in the undertaking, save in passing. The methods of ethics must for the present be seen, all praise or condemnation of them being withheld."<sup>42</sup>

In the following chapter Prof. Stevenson treats of intrinsic and extrinsic

---

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., p. 152.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., p. 153.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., pp. 155-156.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., p. 159.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., p. 160.

value. The distinction often made between an intrinsic good (an end) and extrinsic goods (means) Stevenson finds unsatisfactory. Along these lines Dewey's influence is especially manifest. Stevenson, following Dewey, maintains that in forming a moral judgment a consideration of means is absolutely necessary. He concludes that ". . . a study of means is wholly indispensable to ethics, if moral judgments are to have effective support."<sup>43</sup>

In Chapter IX Prof. Stevenson considers the second pattern of analysis. This pattern intimately ties up with persuasive definitions. Before we consider the precise nature and function of persuasive definitions, the distinguishing features of the second pattern need to be clarified. "In both patterns the ethical terms are considered as emotively active, for in other cases there is no peculiar linguistic or methodological problem. There is in both patterns also an emphasis on disagreement in attitude. The distinguishing features of the second pattern, then, lie solely in the added descriptive meaning that it provides, and the complications of methodology that arise as a consequence."<sup>44</sup>

Since a habitual part of the methodology of the second pattern rests on persuasive definitions, a few words must be said about them. In any persuasive definition the term defined is a familiar one, whose meaning is both strongly emotive and descriptive. "The purport of the definition is to alter the descriptive meaning of the term, usually by giving it a greater precision within the boundaries of its customary vagueness; but the definition does not make any sub-

---

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., p. 201.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., p. 206.



stantial change in the term's emotive meaning."<sup>45</sup>

The persuasive definition is used, consciously or unconsciously, to secure by the interplay between descriptive and emotive meaning, a redirection of people's attitudes. Having established the nature and function of persuasive definitions, Stevenson proceeds to illustrate the role of these definitions in ethical theory. An example that Stevenson offers is Plato's seeking in the Republic whether justice is virtue and wisdom, or evil and folly. If the definition of justice is to be persuasive it must keep its laudatory emotive meaning.

In the following chapter the second pattern is discussed. It is like the first except for certain external aspects. Thus the conclusions as developed for the first pattern can be extended to the second without essential change. In considering methodology for the second pattern the place of persuasion stands out more clearly.

The effect of any persuasive statement lies in the combined use of both emotive and descriptive meanings. This is true not merely because persuasion is so habitually accompanied by reasons, or because emotive meaning is so often dependent on descriptive meaning; it is true quite independently of that. For when emotive meaning praises or condemns, descriptive meaning must indicate the object on which praise or condemnation is bestowed. Without both sorts of meaning, acting together, the persuasion will lack either force or direction. Although a persuasive statement need not give new information about any object, it must at least center the emotive influence on an object that is descriptively designated.<sup>46</sup>

It must be pointed out that the difference between the definitions that typify the two patterns has no bearing on the nature or outcome of ethical arguments.

---

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., p. 210.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., p. 227.

The reason rests on the fact that in ethical arguments the ethical terms are used and not merely studied in a detached way. To use ethical terms is to exert an effort, even if only an initial, tentative one, to influence others. Although the second pattern permits this persuasive effort to be mediated by definitions and the first pattern does not, it remains the case that for every second pattern definition there is a first pattern judgment, the latter being the persuasive counterpart of the former.<sup>47</sup>

This parallel between the first and the second patterns of analysis also manifests itself in regards to personal and interpersonal decisions, intrinsic and extrinsic goods, and persuasive methods. "Little need be said about personal decisions, for the parallel between the two patterns, and the equally close parallel between personal and interpersonal decisions, will make the matter almost self-explanatory."<sup>48</sup> The discussion of intrinsic and extrinsic value in the second pattern, however, ". . . cannot be made to center on the definitions of the terms 'intrinsically good' or 'extrinsically good'; but the same considerations reappear in a new phraseology. The difference between the patterns, here as elsewhere, is only of linguistic interest. It has no bearing on the nature of ethical disagreement or on the extent to which it can be resolved."<sup>49</sup>

Prof. Stevenson concludes the chapter by pointing out the fact that since

---

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., p. 229.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., p. 238.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid., p. 240.

the first pattern uses judgments and supporting reasons that can be emotively active ". . . persuasion need be neither more nor less common in the second pattern than in the first. And the patterns have been shown to be parallel in all other central respects. We may conclude that the choice of one pattern in preference to another is a choice between forms of language; and whichever form of language is adopted, there will be the same possibilities in the information that can be conveyed, and in the influence that can be exerted."<sup>50</sup>

Chapter XI, Moralists and Propagandists, simply applies the second pattern analysis to a special case. In this chapter, Prof. Stevenson attempts to distinguish the different uses of persuasion and their validity.

Stevenson follows this chapter with a very interesting one on certain related theories. The discussion of the related theories helps point up more clearly Stevenson's own position. The analysis of John Dewey receives respectful discussion. A basic difference between Stevenson's and Dewey's analysis rests on the relation of ethics to science. Dewey would make ethics directly related to and dependent upon science, whereas Stevenson would only indirectly relate them and keep both of them independent, just as belief and attitude are independent.

In his discussion of Ayer, Russell, Carnap, and some others, after pointing out that they too hold an emotive theory of ethical terminology, Prof. Stevenson defends them and in some minor points seeks to correct them. He next discusses Perry's position and objects to Perry's unqualified identification of

---

<sup>50</sup>Ibid., pp. 241-242.

ethical judgments with psychological statements about interests. "Throughout Perry's work the analytic and psychological aspects of ethics are confused with the normative ones--a confusion which at once distorts analysis and hampers well-defended evaluations. But it is often possible to separate the confused elements and recombine them. When this is done, Perry's work affords many suggestions, interesting to analysts and practical moralists alike."<sup>51</sup>

A discussion of G. E. Moore follows, especially in line with the second pattern of analysis. Prof. Stevenson summarizes his treatment thus:

Almost all of those who now emphasize the emotive aspects of ethics (including the present writer) have at one time been greatly under Moore's influence. It is not easy to believe that this is an accident. The parallel between his views and the present ones--which in spite of all the differences remains surprisingly close--will be evident from this observation: Wherever Moore would point to a "naturalistic fallacy," the present writer, throughout the many possible senses which the second pattern recognizes, would point to a persuasive definition.<sup>52</sup>

Stevenson ends the chapter with a consideration of the ethical position of David Hume. Stevenson points out his Humean tendencies when he writes that "of all traditional philosophers, Hume has most clearly asked the questions that here concern us, and has most nearly reached a conclusion that the present writer can accept."<sup>53</sup> Prof. Stevenson, however, does object to Hume's emphasizing disagreement in belief but not disagreement in attitude. By neglecting disagreement in attitude, Stevenson maintains, Hume oversimplifies and overintellectualizes the arguments that occur between people who are not yet factually informed,

---

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., p. 271.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid., pp. 272-273.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., p. 273.

and provides no place for persuasive methods.<sup>54</sup>

Chapter XIII finds Prof. Stevenson considering some further observations on the function of definitions. An understanding of the second pattern requires only an understanding of persuasive definitions. But they are not always easy to recognize nor are their distinguishing characteristics always clear. "There are a number of cases in which persuasive definitions might be confused with persuasive statements of another sort, or with definitions of a more neutral character. So it will be well to make some additional distinctions. The remarks of this chapter are not indispensable to ethical analysis, but may help to dispel misapprehensions, and to throw light on the several uses of language."<sup>55</sup>

Stevenson fills out the chapter with considerations of persuasive quasi-definitions, detached definitions and their effect on interests in knowledge, emphatic definitions, and legal definitions. Since the additional remarks of this chapter are dispensable to ethical analysis, their absence from a summary of Stevenson's ethical theory will not be missed.

In the following Chapter Prof. Stevenson considers the problem of freedom in ethical matters under the notions of avoidability and indeterminism. Avoidability and indeterminism are independent of one another. Avoidability is related to voluntary activity. "In evaluating conduct people usually limit their judgments to actions which they consider avoidable, or subject to voluntary con-

---

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., pp. 275-276. Stevenson would find objection naturally to Hume since he makes ethics a natural science. Such a view has no place for attitudes.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid., p. 277.

trol."<sup>56</sup> But actions subject to voluntary control are not indeterminate actions. The fact that "'A's action was avoidable' is by no means synonymous with 'A's action sprang from an indetermined choice.'"<sup>57</sup> Prof. Stevenson continues with a discussion of the free will doctrine in ethics, asserting that much confusion could be avoided if the proper distinctions were maintained between avoidability and indeterminism. He confesses that "our study of avoidability has introduced little novelty into the present analysis of ethics."<sup>58</sup>

The final chapter considers some practical implications. These reduce themselves basically to "the proper place of science in ethics."<sup>59</sup> If science deals with beliefs and ethics with attitudes, the question arises as to the way in which they are related. The important fact which Stevenson continually stresses throughout the whole book is that ethics is not reducible to science.

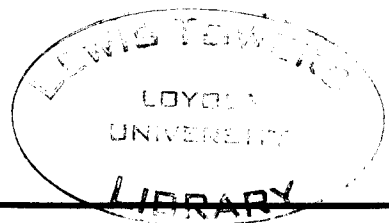
Having presented very briefly and in outline form the basic teaching of Ethics and Language, chapter by chapter, we can present now a more compact and systematized summary. Like A. J. Ayer, Prof. Stevenson transfers all the factual statements of ethics to the social scientists and relegates all the normative expressions of ethics to the limbo of emotive utterances. But unlike Ayer, Stevenson extends his ethical inquiry to include an examination of the role of emotive expressions in ethical disputes. He begins by pointing out that ethical

<sup>56</sup>Ibid., p. 298.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid., p. 299.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid., p. 306.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid., p. 319.



arguments involve both factual and evaluative elements. Although there is a complex interplay of beliefs and attitudes, ethical disagreement is primarily a matter of disagreement in attitude, and secondarily of disagreement in belief.

His approach to the subject of ethical disagreement fixes itself on the method of resolving ethical disputes by recognizing the difference between disagreement in belief and disagreement in attitude and by pointing to disagreement in attitude as the distinguishing feature of ethical disagreement.

Prof. Stevenson enlarges upon this thesis that ethical disagreements are chiefly matters of attitude by showing two ways in which they function in actual situations. First, conflicting attitudes determine what disagreements in belief are relevant to an argument, and secondly, they determine whether or not the argument has been settled.

Stevenson is a positivist. Thus he shares the view that normative ethics cannot be a science. But at the same time he recognizes normative ethics as a vital human activity, in which science can--in favorable circumstances--contribute materially to the resolution of ethical (attitudinal) disagreements. As a human activity, ethics has its own characteristic functions and methods for the treatment of moral issues, i.e., issues involving "personal and social decisions about what is to be approved." To sum up, ethics is not itself a science, though science may be of major importance in the resolution of ethical problems.<sup>60</sup>

In this framework fit the nature and function of emotive meaning and persuasive definitions. The patterns of analysis and their methods present types of explanation for emotively laden terms and persuasive definitions and the

---

<sup>60</sup>See Ethel M. Albert, Great Traditions in Ethics (New York, 1953), p. 341.

way they can be used to resolve ethical disputes. These, then, constitute the very essence of Prof. Stevenson's ethical theory.

Thus far we have considered the man, his milieu, and his influence on his milieu. We have presented in summary form the basic structure of Prof. Stevenson's meta-ethical theory. In the following chapter we shall discuss the core issue of this theory.



## CHAPTER III

### THE CORE ISSUE

This chapter, transitional insofar as it links Prof. Stevenson's theory with an evaluation of it, covers four points. First, the purpose of the chapter is shown. Next, the high points of Stevenson's theory are presented in order better to understand the underlying problem. This leads into a presentation of the core problem itself. Finally, conclusions are drawn.

Having come to know Prof. Stevenson as a philosopher and his philosophical environment, and having considered in a brief and summary form his ethical theory, we must now analyze his theory in an attempt to unearth and present the core issue or problem with which Prof. Stevenson concerns himself. There are at least two reasons for a presentation of the core issue: first to make Prof. Stevenson's ethical theory manifestly clear, and secondly to evaluate properly the solution that he offers in response to the basic problem.

The summary as presented in the last chapter must of its very nature be inadequate. It does not investigate the theory in order to bring to light the assumptions, presuppositions, bias, or covert problems that rest hidden at the heart of the theory. In order, therefore, to make Stevenson's theory lucid, the underlying, core problem needs to be understood.

The core issue with which Prof. Stevenson concerns himself also needs

careful presentation if his resolution of that issue is to be properly evaluated. The evaluation must depend upon an intrinsic criticism of the theory. But such an intrinsic criticism obviously demands a thorough knowledge of the intrinsic structure and content of the theory. Prof. Stevenson proposes to answer a problem. That problem manifests itself on different levels. On the first and most manifest level Stevenson presents the problem as one of clarification of terms and characterization of the methods of resolving ethical disagreement.<sup>1</sup> Yet deeper levels exist and with them more basic problems. Stevenson's answer to the problem of the confusion that exists in ethical terminology rests on his analytical method of clarifying terms. But a more basic problem arises in the question, "What is it in ethical terms that leads them to be confused and to need clarification in the first place?" Thus to evaluate Prof. Stevenson's theory properly and fairly the core issue must be presented.

A method of arriving at the core issue of any system is to grasp the high points of the system. These high points should already be fairly obvious, but they will appear a little clearer in this chapter. Once these high points and their significance are grasped, an analysis of them will lead to the core issue.

In summary form the high points can be paired off into interpersonal-personal, disagreement-agreement, attitude-belief, emotive-descriptive meanings, ethics-science. A full understanding demands a consideration of each of these.

In all Prof. Stevenson's writings except one the interpersonal problems of

---

<sup>1</sup>EL, p. 1.

ethics are stressed.<sup>2</sup> He does this partly for pragmatic reasons. He points out that "... there is a convenience in looking chiefly to the interpersonal problems, where the use of terms and methods is most clearly evidenced."<sup>3</sup> Besides convenience, there is also a necessity in looking chiefly to the interpersonal problems since disregard of such problems undercuts Stevenson's notion of the chief concern of ethics, that is, the conflict, the disagreement and agreement in ethics; Stevenson criticizes Nowell-Smith for failing to consider interpersonal problems.<sup>4</sup> Where better study disagreement and agreement?

The interpersonal problems, however, as has already been pointed out, parallel the personal problems.<sup>5</sup> In a personal decision about an ethical issue a man is trying to make up his mind whether to approve or disapprove of something. So long as he is ethically undecided, "his attitudes are in a psychological state of conflict; half of him approves of a certain object or action, and the other half of him disapproves of it."<sup>6</sup> Thus, the ingredients that make up an interpersonal situation present themselves in a personal problem, a duality of conflict. These ingredients point the way to the core problem for which we are searching.

The basic ingredients of any ethical situation, therefore, are a certain duality and a conflict until this duality is made a unity. This opens the way

---

<sup>2</sup>See "The Emotive Conception of Ethics" for a treatment of personal problems.

<sup>3</sup>EL, p. 2.

<sup>4</sup>Charles L. Stevenson, "Ethics by P.H. Nowell-Smith," Mind, LXIV (July 1955), p. 409.

<sup>5</sup>See p. 27 of this work.

<sup>6</sup>"The Emotive Conception of Ethics . . ." pp. 291-292.

for another high point of Stevenson's theory, ethical agreement and disagreement. "When ethical issues become controversial, they involve disagreement that is of a dual nature. There is almost inevitably disagreement in belief, which requires detailed, sensitive attention; but there is also disagreement in attitude."<sup>7</sup> Just as disagreement and agreement is more basic than interpersonal and personal, so it is also more basic than either emotive or descriptive meaning. Stevenson states that his ". . . methodological conclusions center less on my conception of meaning than on my conception of agreement and disagreement."<sup>8</sup> An examination of Stevenson's conception of agreement and disagreement will bring us closer to the core issue and make an evaluation of his theory easier.

Stevenson realizes that there are disagreements and disagreements. He is interested in ethical disagreement, and therefore, must sort out the ethical from the scientific. He can make such a distinction by introducing the notions of belief and attitude into his discussion. Obviously there can be agreement in belief. "Ethical agreement, however, requires more than agreement in belief; it requires agreement in attitude."<sup>9</sup> Stevenson goes on to show, therefore, that besides agreement in belief there also may be agreement in attitude. Clearly, then, no separation of one from the other is necessarily entailed.

---

<sup>7</sup>EL. p.11

<sup>8</sup>Charles L. Stevenson, "Meaning: Descriptive and Emotive," The Philosophical Review, LVII (March 1948), p. 142.

<sup>9</sup>EL, p. 31. To be more correct, Prof. Stevenson does not arbitrarily introduce the notions of belief and attitude into his discussion. He feels that the data of ordinary ethical language when analyzed offer agreement in belief and agreement in attitude. His analysis points out that it is the distinction between agreement in belief and in attitude that distinguishes science from ethics.

Although the controversial aspects of ethics spring from disagreement in attitude . . . they rarely if ever spring from this kind of disagreement alone. Beliefs are the guides to attitudes; hence the issues that arise in establishing and testing them, or in giving them a practical organization, retain a vital place throughout all normative discourse. If we are to understand the basic nature of ethical problems, and thus to economize the energies that are directed to resolving them, we must ever be sensitive to the dual nature of ethical disagreement. Attitudes and beliefs both play their part, and must be studied in their intimate relationship.<sup>10</sup>

The distinction between agreement in attitude and in belief parallels the distinction Stevenson finds when dealing with the meaning of ethical terms. He distinguishes meaning into emotive and descriptive. Emotive meaning characterizes ethical terms and is the basis for the possibility of agreement or disagreement in attitude. Descriptive meaning characterizes factual terms. Therefore, just as belief and attitude cannot be separated if the total picture of an ethical problem is to appear, neither can emotive and descriptive meaning.<sup>11</sup>

Another distinction logically follows. Prof. Stevenson proceeds to distinguish ethics and science. Science deals with descriptive meanings and any disagreement which may arise is disagreement in belief. The disagreement in ethics, however, is disagreement in attitude. Stevenson takes pains to show that ethics is not a branch of any science, because the disagreement or agreement in ethics is not always in belief, whereas agreement or disagreement in science always is.<sup>12</sup> Thus the distinction between ethics and science logically follows. Even

---

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., pp. 18-19.

<sup>11</sup>At first appearance emotive meaning seems the center of Stevenson's system; (as was pointed out on page 9, Stevenson's doctoral dissertation dealt with the emotive meaning of ethical terms) but his theory, however, has evolved as is clear from Aiken's observation that Stevenson's emotive theory is more developed as presented in Ethics and Language.

<sup>12</sup>EL, p. 10 ff.

at this level, Prof. Stevenson affirms the intimate connection of the two. An ethical judgment must often use the supporting reasons gained from science. The parallel, therefore, runs through disagreement-agreement, attitude-belief, emotive meaning-descriptive meaning, ethics-science.

This parallel, running through Prof. Stevenson's theory, gives us the high points of that theory. Certain conclusions can now follow. The basic conclusion maintains that the cornerstone of Prof. Stevenson's position rests not on the stress placed on interpersonal problems nor on the distinction between disagreement and agreement. It rests on a more fundamental distinction, a distinction that makes agreement and disagreement in ethical matters possible. It rests on the distinction between beliefs and attitudes.

Stevenson's treatment of meaning and its division into descriptive and emotive (whether or not the emotive meaning be dependent, quasi-dependent, or independent) circles around this distinction. The persuasive definitions of the second pattern presuppose this division of meaning and the distinction of beliefs and attitudes. Needless to say, ethics is differentiated from science because of this distinction between beliefs and attitudes. Because Stevenson's analysis of the human linguistic situation reveals beliefs and attitudes, the distinctions already enumerated immediately follow.

Because of the importance of attitude and belief, the need of a more careful study of them is evident. What is an attitude? Disagreement in attitude is basically ". . . an opposition of purposes, aspirations, wants, preferences, desires, and so on . . . . The disagreement springs more from divergent prefer-

ences than from divergent beliefs."<sup>13</sup> The concept of attitude closely allies itself to that of emotive meaning. "The emotive meaning of a word is a tendency of a word, arising through the history of its usage, to produce (result from) affective responses in people."<sup>14</sup> Thus the connection between emotive meaning and attitudes is obvious. Emotive meaning has a tendency to produce affective responses, i. e., attitudes in people. An attitude could be defined, therefore, as any and every affective response such as an aspiration, a want, a preference, a desire, and the like. It is important to note that attitudes like emotive meaning are dynamic and tend to activity. Their existence affects the practical sphere of human living.

What is a belief? Belief is closely allied to descriptive meaning. Stevenson has pointed out that ". . . when judgments are used purely descriptively, the only disagreement that can arise is disagreement in belief."<sup>15</sup> There is a causal (or as Stevenson would prefer, a dispositional) relationship between descriptive meaning and beliefs. Beliefs deal with matters of fact. For that reason they deal with formal logic and induction.<sup>16</sup> A belief is cognitive, i.e., it designates such specific kinds of mental activity as ". . . believing, thinking, supposing, presuming, and so on."<sup>17</sup> It is important to note that beliefs as cognitive and dependent on descriptive meaning are passive rather than

---

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>14</sup>"The Emotive Meaning of Ethical Terms," p. 23.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 27.

<sup>16</sup>EL, pp. 113-114.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 62.

active. They look to the speculative side of human existence.

The core problem now remains to be unearthed. The distinction between attitude and belief answers the basic problem which bothers Stevenson. Having the answer we must move backward to the problem itself. What is the problem? That is the question that now occupies us.

What is Prof. Stevenson trying to explain when he offers his distinction between belief and attitude? Obviously he tries to explain the difference between a factual statement (a matter of fact) and an ethical statement. The core problem, therefore, might be stated: 1) What is the difference between a factual statement and an ethical statement? or 2) How explain the difference between a factual statement and an ethical statement? Prof. Stevenson implies that he is dealing with this problem when he states that "the process of making an ethical decision is something more, of course, than the process of formulating factual beliefs; but that is simply because reasons, in addition to their cognitive nature, have conative-affective effects. An ethical decision requires a full or partial resolution of conflict, and no set of beliefs can be identified with this, however much it may contribute to it."<sup>18</sup>

The same type of problem underlies much of the ethical writing of David Hume. Nor must Hume's influence on the modern scene be over looked. If, from the philosophical tradition that extends from the ancient Greeks through the last century, a selection were made of a single thinker predominantly influential on current philosophic thought, next to Descartes, David Hume, the eighteenth-century Scotsman, would probably have the strongest claim. "More than

---

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 133.



any other person of the past, Hume established the spirit and pattern of philosophical analysis. Indeed, a philosopher as eminent as Bertrand Russell says quite explicitly that so nearly was Hume on the right track that one cannot do better than to follow his lead and carry along further in the same direction.<sup>19</sup> Thus the possibility of a link between Hume's problem and that which occupies Stevenson exists and is a reality when Hume's problem and Stevenson's are shown to be basically the same.

It must be noted that although Hume offers a different solution, the problem he attempts to answer is the same as Stevenson's. Hume offered a different solution because of what he attempted. The subtitle of Hume's A Treatise of Human Nature is "Being an Attempt to Introduce the Experimental Method of Reasoning into Moral Subjects." In attempting to introduce the experimental method into ethical problems, Hume structured the solution to his problem. He made ethics a part of science.

This offers at least one reason why the positivists are linked to Hume. At one time the positivists held a theory of meaning whose main component was the so-called "verification principle." According to this principle, for a synthetic (non-tautologous) proposition to be cognitively meaningful, it must be capable in principle of being verified (or confirmed) by an appeal to empirical evidence. Through use of the verification principle the logical positivists hoped to limit the area of cognitive meaningfulness to subjects that can be dealt with by the methodology of the empirical sciences.<sup>20</sup> Like Hume they wanted to introduce the

---

<sup>19</sup>Contemporary Philosophy, p. 6.

<sup>20</sup>Oliver A. Johnson, Ethics (New York, 1958), p. 456 ff.

experimental methods of reasoning into ethical questions.

As is evident from the first chapter, Stevenson is in the positivist tradition. Since he is in that tradition, the problem (s) that he will attempt to answer will be those of the positivists. This, of course, does not limit Prof. Stevenson's solution to that of the positivists. He would not agree with them when they conclude that because ethical propositions fail to satisfy the criterion of verifiability, they must be pseudo-propositions, devoid of cognitive significance. Stevenson would not agree with Ayer when he writes that "we begin by admitting that the fundamental ethical concepts are unanalysable, inasmuch as there is no criterion by which one can test the validity of the judgments in which they occur . . . . We say that the reason why they are unanalysable is that they are mere pseudo-concepts."<sup>21</sup> Because Stevenson has found another answer to basically the same problem, he does not agree with Ayer. Stevenson's answer rests on the distinction between attitude and belief, emotive meaning and descriptive meaning. An ethical term is not completely analysable into descriptive meaning, because emotive meaning is present. The important fact that needs notice is that the problem as found in Hume or in the positivists or in Stevenson remains basically the same.

In order more clearly to understand the problem, a brief consideration of it as found in Hume is needed. A moral problem for Hume is one which deals with our actions and affections. Such a conception has many ramifications. Since morals have an influence on actions and affections, it follows that ". . . they cannot be derived from reason, and that because reason alone, as we have al-

---

<sup>21</sup>Language, Truth and Logic, p. 6.

ready proved, can never have any such influence. Morals excite passions, and produce or prevent actions. Reason of itself is utterly impotent in this particular. The rules of morality, therefore, are not conclusions of our reason."<sup>22</sup>

Thus we notice that Hume makes a distinction between reason and passion. Reason, according to Hume, is the faculty of understanding and knowledge. But knowledge is one thing; to be moved by that knowledge to act is something else. It is erroneous to attribute to reason the motivating power which belongs to other faculties.<sup>23</sup> As Hume himself says in his Treatise: "Reason is wholly inactive, and can never be a source of so active a principle as conscience, or a sense of morals."<sup>24</sup> In An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals Hume points out that "reason being cool and disengaged is no motive to action, and directs only the impulse received from appetite or inclination, by showing us the means of attaining happiness or avoiding misery."<sup>25</sup>

From what has been said thus far, the passions are clearly the dynamic aspect of moral judgments. They alone are the "springs of action." Hume maintains that passion, ". . . as it gives pleasure or pain, and thereby constitutes happiness or misery, becomes a motive to action and is the first spring to impulse, to desire and volition."<sup>26</sup> The passions are the active principle of choice.

---

<sup>22</sup>David Hume, Hume's Moral and Political Philosophy, ed Henry D. Aiken (New York, 1948), p. 33.

<sup>23</sup>Hume's conception of reason as passive follows in the Lockean tradition.

<sup>24</sup>Hume, p. 34.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 269.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid.

Although both are working on different levels, Hume on the psychological, Stevenson on the linguistic and logical, it is clear that reason and passion in Hume's system are similar to belief and attitude in Stevenson's. For this reason and in this framework Stevenson can write that ". . . moral judgments go beyond cognition, speaking to the conative-affective nature of men."<sup>27</sup>

Prof. Stevenson's problem, therefore, is much like Hume's. Both wish to know the difference between matters of fact and matters of action, between 'Is' and 'Ought.' This problem deals not with the difference between the two, but the transit from the one to the other. How move from 'Is' to 'Ought,' from facts to actions? Hume has his solution, a solution which needs no elucidation at this time. Stevenson has his solution. This solution does need presentation.

Stevenson first answers negatively and states what the transit from an 'Is' to an 'Ought,' from a factual judgment to an ethical judgment is not. It is not an inductive leap because, as Stevenson points out, ". . . the empirical facts are not inductive grounds from which the ethical judgment problematically follows."<sup>28</sup> The reason for this lies in the fact that ethical decisions or evaluations are emotive or attitudinal. They may be related to knowledge as effects to causes, but not as logical conclusions to premises.<sup>29</sup> Moreover, ethical problems extend beyond formal logic and induction. As Stevenson observes, ethics, ". . .

<sup>27</sup>EL, p. 13.

<sup>28</sup>The Emotive Meaning of Ethical Terms, p. 29.

<sup>29</sup>Sidney Zink, "Methodological Guidance and Ethical Detachment," The Philosophical Review, LXI (April 1952), p. 226.

to whatever extent its problems extend beyond agreement and disagreement in belief, may involve methods that extend beyond formal logic and induction."<sup>30</sup> As we have seen in the last chapter (pp. 23-24), formal logic provides conditions for the rational acceptance of ethical judgments, "but not sufficient ones," because ethical judgments include something more than descriptive meaning and belief.<sup>31</sup>

Prof. Stevenson next considers the problem more positively. Along with the other proponents of the emotive theory of ethical discourse, he maintains that an ethical statement, from a logical point of view, is not descriptive, but a concealed imperative. Now it is logically impossible to derive an imperative from any set of sentences all of which are in the indicative mood and none of which contain even a concealed imperative. Thus it is evident that there must always be some moral imperative which is not reducible to, or cannot be translated into, cognitively verifiable, descriptive statements. Ethical judgments always contain an imperative component which is said to be non-cognitive in the sense of being unverifiable according to public empirical evidence in conjunction with the laws of logic.<sup>32</sup> In sum, what the no-ought-from-an-is doctrine asserts is that ". . . no value judgment can be deduced from a set of purely factual statements; more generally still, that no value judgment can be deduced

---

<sup>30</sup>EL, pp. 113-114.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., p. 135.

<sup>32</sup>For the Emotive Theory's connection with empiricism and derivation from certain major sources see Hans Meyerhoff, "Emotive and Existentialist Theories of Ethics," *The Journal of Philosophy*, XLVIII (December 6, 1951).

from a set of premises which does not contain a value judgment."<sup>33</sup> Prof. Stevenson, therefore, solves the problem by asserting: "Ethical statements have a meaning that is approximately, and in part, imperative."<sup>34</sup> Because of this an imperative conclusion can be logically inferred from ethical statements.

Such a solution is not new with Stevenson. G. E. Moore tackled the same problem and offered a solution somewhat similar to Stevenson's, except for Moore an imperative is unanalysable. Let us consider Moore's position a little more in detail. Moore agrees that ethics is concerned with the question of what good conduct is; "but, being concerned with this, it obviously does not start at the beginning, unless it is prepared to tell us what is good as well as what is conduct."<sup>35</sup> Since conduct is in some way or other the outcome of the moving force of an imperative, the imperative is not concealed in the conduct. If there is a concealed imperative, it must be in the 'good'. Moore, therefore, gives an analysis of 'good', in which he concludes that 'good' is undefinable. "Or if I am asked 'How is good to be defined?' my answer is that it cannot be defined, and that is all I have to say about it."<sup>36</sup> In other words, an imperative as imperative cannot be equated with any natural property. Thus, it cannot stand the test of verifiability. It is at this point that Moore introduces his naturalistic fallacy.<sup>37</sup>

---

<sup>33</sup>R. F. Atkinson & A. C. Montefiore, "'Ought' and 'Is,'" Philosophy, XXXIII (January 1958), p. 30.

<sup>34</sup>EL, p. 26.

<sup>35</sup>Principia Ethica, p. 2.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., p. 6.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., p. 9.

In dealing with some related theories, Prof. Stevenson expresses his indebtedness to David Hume and G. E. Moore. He maintains that of all traditional philosophers, Hume considered the same problems ". . . that here concern us, and has most nearly reached a conclusion that the present writer can accept."<sup>38</sup> Stevenson points out his relationship to Moore and Moore's problems when he confesses that "almost all of those who now emphasize the emotive aspects of ethics (including the present writer) have at one time been greatly under Moore's influence. It is not easy to believe that this is an accident. The parallel between his views and the present ones--which in spite of all differences remains surprisingly close--will be evident from this observation: Wherever Moore would point to a 'naturalistic fallacy', the present writer . . . would point to a persuasive definition."<sup>39</sup>

Thus we see that Prof. Stevenson deals with the same problems that Hume and Moore dealt with. What distinguishes an empirical statement from an ethical statement? His solution, which is abundantly evident from the preceding, points to differences in attitudes and beliefs, emotive meaning and descriptive meaning.

Stevenson also considers their other problem: How does one move from 'Is' to 'Ought'? The transit is made by means of a concealed imperative. The factual statement has a dual linguistic function in ethical statements. It has descriptive meaning, but it also contains emotive meaning. Because the emotive meaning is similar to or involves an imperative, the leap from apparently factual prem-

---

<sup>38</sup>EL, p. 273.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., pp. 272-273. Italics not in the original.

ises to an ethical conclusion can be made. Stevenson, therefore, can argue against Moore. 'Good' is definable and in terms of a natural quality or property. It is definable in terms of emotive meaning, i.e., in terms of attitudinal properties.

Now that we have unearthed and brought to light the core issue that underlies Prof. Stevenson's theory, a brief resume of what we have accomplished will give a clearer view of what is left to uncover in our attempt to understand and evaluate properly Prof. Stevenson's position. In the first chapter we introduced Prof. Stevenson and placed him in his philosophic environment. Chapter II summarized his ethical theory. The present chapter sifted out and analyzed the core issue that underlies and motivates Prof. Stevenson's writings.

What is left to be done? We have come to grips with Stevenson's problem and his solution. Now is the time to evaluate both in order to see if the problem really is a problem and if the solution really answers the problem. This work of evaluation we shall attempt to do in the following chapter.



## CHAPTER IV

### AN EVALUATION AND COMMENTS

In this chapter we shall try to evaluate the theory proposed by Charles L. Stevenson. Such an evaluation, although very brief, will center around Stevenson's theory itself, attempting to criticize it intrinsically. Such a criticism must begin with the problem itself that Stevenson tries to answer. We shall present, therefore, the logical problem, its nature, Stevenson's solution, and our critique. Next, we shall discuss the epistemological-psychological problem, the distinction between ethics and science, Stevenson's epistemology, and finally offer a criticism and comments.

The problem can be considered logically, epistemologically, or psychologically. We shall consider the logical problem. One statement of the logical problem reduces itself to "How logically proceed from 'Is' to 'Ought'?" Yet a closer look points out the more basic problem: What distinguishes an empirical judgment from an ethical judgment? More basically, Stevenson must answer the question (either explicitly or implicitly): Are empirical and ethical conclusions different?

What is to be said for this basic problem as a problem? Is it a real problem? Is it valid and susceptible of a meaningful answer? It is a meaningful question, a real and valid problem as can be seen from the consequences, at least

the consequence that if there is no difference between an empirical and an ethical statement, then there is no logical difficulty in moving from 'Is' to 'Ought', from an empirical premise to an ethical conclusion. If there is a difference between them, then new problems arise. In either case the problem is capable of a meaningful answer.

The problem is valid for a second reason, at least according to a common-sense linguistic analysis, since an empirical statement does differ from an ethical statement. The statement that "Yellow occupies such a place in the spectrum" does differ from the statement that "you ought to obey your mother and father." Therefore, Stevenson either will agree with the common-sense analysis or disagree, and thereby be forced to offer proof that the common-sense analysis is false.

Stevenson answers that empirical and ethical statements are different. While he tells us why they are different, Stevenson also tells us how they differ. They differ in at least four ways. 1. An empirical statement deals with matters of fact, while an ethical deals with matters of action or evaluation. 2. An empirical statement springs from a man's beliefs, while an ethical springs ultimately from a man's attitudes. 3. An empirical statement is subject to empirical verifiability; an ethical statement is not. 4. An empirical statement follows the laws of formal logic and induction, whereas an ethical statement does not because it is basically emotive and only cognitively meaningful statements can follow the laws of formal logic and induction.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup>The differences between the two types of statements, although not expressed as such by Stevenson in *Ethics and Language*, are there implicitly. Chapter II and III tried to point them out in passing.

A brief critique of Prof. Stevenson's answer is demanded. A consideration of the first difference seems to indicate an oversimplification on Stevenson's part, an inadequacy. An empirical statement does definitely deal with matters of fact. We agree with Prof. Stevenson. We also agree that an ethical statement deals with matters of action and facts. Because something is factually such and such, therefore, something ought to be done. We find the facts expressed in reasons. Stevenson readily admits the place of reasons in ethical discourse, but maintains that they differ from the reasons that support an empirical proposition.<sup>2</sup> Reasons, he maintains, support the ethical statement in the way that reasons support imperatives.

Not everyone would agree with Prof. Stevenson's reasoning. Certain authors think that more often than not reasons are related to ethical statements logically and not merely psychologically. Harrod offers this example. "Do not kill an innocent person because that would not be altruistic." The reason, "because that would not be altruistic," is logically related to the ethical statement, "do not kill an innocent person," as a minor premise to its conclusion. Harrod explains the syllogism in this manner:

The major premise of all ethical judgments, general or particular, might be expressed as 'one ought to be altruistic', this premise constituting a definition of 'ought'. In conjunction with various facts about human (or animal) needs and pains and laws of nature, etc., this premise yields a variety of conclusions, general and particular, containing the word 'ought'. The 'ought' in these con-

---

<sup>2</sup>EL, p. 113.

clusions is accounted for by the 'ought' in the major premise. Since this is a definition there is no meaning in asking why one ought to be altruistic.<sup>3</sup>

According to such a procedure, therefore, in some instances reasons can imply the ethical statement as conclusion. In other words, a particular ethical statement can be deduced from a more universal ethical principle. An example which makes use of a first order moral principle as a major premise from which an ethical conclusion follows reads: "Do good and avoid evil. But this is good. Therefore do this." The major premise as a first order moral principle includes the imperative, "Do good." The factual or empirical statement is the minor, "This particular thing or action is good." Thus the ethical and the empirical statements are necessarily linked.

The objection might be raised that "This is good" is not a factual or empirical statement. If the factual or empirical is limited to natural properties, then such an objection is valid, and G. E. More is correct in enunciating his naturalistic fallacy. If it is limited to beliefs and "This is good" is seen as essentially a matter of attitudes as Stevenson maintains, then the objection is again valid. But if the empirical or factual is not limited directly to natural properties and if, although limited to beliefs, "This is good" is viewed as essentially a matter of beliefs, then the objection is not valid, and an ethical conclusion can be inferred from an ethical major and an empirical minor.

There should follow an analysis of "This is good," demonstrating that it is reducible to beliefs, but that would take us too far afield. This, however, is

---

<sup>3</sup>Ray Forbes Harrod, Foundations of Inductive Logic (New York, 1956), pp. 271-272.

the point of disagreement. As we proceed, we shall show that the reduction of 'good' essentially to attitudes is untenable and leads to exaggerated consequences. Thus, although the problem will still stand unsolved, at least we shall know that Prof. Stevenson's solution is not entirely satisfactory or adequate.

Although the question of whether or not "This is good" is an empirical or an ethical statement remains open, still the logical relatedness of empirical and ethical statements has not been disproved. Ethics presupposes experience and for this reason empirical statements can be related to ethical statements inductively. By a description and an analysis of human nature, the ethicist proceeds inductively to a certain general proposition or principle from which an ethical system can be deduced. It is also by reflection on one's experience that the first order moral principles become explicit. Although this does not come about through induction, it does point out that ethics does presuppose experience, the empirical. For this reason, the method of ethics is not purely inductive nor deductive, but a combination of the two. It is empirico-deductive in character. Thus, while such a method realizes the difference between an empirical statement and an ethical statement, it does not stress the difference and strive to isolate the statements; rather it stresses the relatedness of the statements and strives to point out their mutual cooperation.

This is the point at which we disagree with Stevenson's analysis. He over-stresses the difference between the ethical and the empirical. It does not seem justified to maintain, as Stevenson does, that the ethical is the ethical and the empirical the empirical and never the twain shall meet.

What is Stevenson's basis for stressing this difference? An answer to this question will point out, a little more clearly, the general tendency in Steven-

son to stress differences. By stressing differences, he runs the risk of introducing a basic duality into his ethical theory. This can be exemplified by considering the distinction between an ethical statement and an empirical statement. The foundation for the distinction between an ethical statement and an empirical statement is twofold: the difference between emotive and descriptive meaning and between beliefs and attitudes.

We shall discuss first emotive and descriptive meaning. Meaning for Prof. Stevenson, at least in ethical discourse, is of two types, emotive and descriptive. Charner Perry raises the question, "Are these the only types of meaning relevant to ethical discourse?" It would seem that such a division is not exhaustive. This classification is based on an analysis of a term's use. Stevenson finds that in ethical situations, language is used in two ways, descriptively and emotively. Thus he puts forth this classification. Yet another type of analysis, for example, an analysis in terms of the method of verification, could lead to a different classification, use meaning and function meaning for example.

A problem immediately arises of determining which method or what method of classification is valid and adequate. Is Stevenson's method, the description and analysis of how ethical terms are used, valid in explaining what meaning is? The method seems to be invalid because it deals with the way language is used and not with the meaning of language. The method correctly leads to the conclusion that in an ethical situation there is language that is used descriptively and language that is used emotively. The method, however, really tells nothing about the meaning of ethical discourse, but rather about the language in which the meaning, the very heart and soul, pulse and life of ethical discourse

is clothed.

If Prof. Stevenson would urge that this method does deal with the meaning of ethical terms, then the method would be inadequate because it seems to violate the interiority and subjectivity of meaning and fails to grasp the fact that meaning has an inside as well as an outside. This point we shall treat at greater length when we come to discuss Prof. Stevenson's theory of meaning. But the inadequacy of the method is shown when besides descriptive and emotive, the method also offers "expressive" meaning.

If we follow Stevenson's lead to its fullest, we shall find that ethical language can be used in at least three ways: descriptively, emotively, and expressively. Language is used descriptively in describing objectively an ethical situation, e.g., "If men commit treason, these consequences follow." It is used emotively in emoting subjectively over an ethical situation. But language can also be used expressively in expressing in emotive-cognitive terms the subjectively grasped objective intelligibility of an ethical situation. For example, when one man tells another in a non-argumentative way that he clearly sees that as far as he is concerned, to sell films to a foreign power would be an act of treason, and for him treason is wrong, and thus he cannot sell them, he is doing something more than objectively describing an ethical situation (since he is involved in the situation and committed to a way of action, and thus does not present the situation in pure objectivity) or subjectively expressing his feelings and attempting to change the hearer's feelings to conform with his since the commitment is personal and more than a matter of feelings. He is expressing in language at once both cognitive and emotive an objective situation which has meaning for him and in which he is personally committed. Thus, the "expressive"

meaning of ethical language is the union of descriptive and emotive meaning.

A similar criticism arises when Prof. Stevenson's division of attitude and belief is considered. Is the distinction between belief and attitude valid? Some would maintain (Charner Perry for one) that it is not a complete disjunction.<sup>4</sup> Others would object to his lack of precision in dealing with belief and attitude pointing out that Stevenson ". . . confuses attitudes of two different levels."<sup>5</sup> Henry David Aiken would object to the division because, as he sees it, beliefs are attitudes. They differ merely in the fact that "beliefs are interested in matters of truth and falsity; other attitudes are not."<sup>6</sup> Everett W. Hall criticizes Stevenson's division from a different angle. He objects to Stevenson's contention that attitudes have merely causes and effects. Hall would want to add the notion of objects. Attitudes are not blind. They ". . . do have objects and not merely causes and effects, that is . . . they are not simply behavioural facts but possess a semantical dimension."<sup>7</sup>

We observe, therefore, that there is a difference of opinion over whether or not the distinctions between attitude and belief, emotive and descriptive meaning, are adequate. If the distinctions are ~~inadequate~~, the duality that Prof. Stevenson has built up in the ethical situation is also inadequate. There are further reasons for an inadequacy. The foundation of these distinctions are

---

<sup>4</sup>Charner Perry, "Sound Ethics and Confused Language," Ethics, LV (Oct. 1944), p. 209. Perry believes that such a division is inadequate.

<sup>5</sup>Everett W. Hall, "Stevenson On Disagreement in Attitude," Ethics, LVIII (Oct. 1947), p. 56.

<sup>6</sup>Henry David Aiken, "Ethics and Language," The Journal of Philosophy, XLII (August 16, 1945), p. 461.

<sup>7</sup>Everett W. Hall, "Practical Reasons," Mind, LXIV (July 1955), p. 320.



buried in Stevenson's epistemology and psychology, or at any rate in his epistemological and psychological presuppositions. These we shall consider shortly.

A few comments concerning the notion and place of verifiability in Prof. Stevenson's approach are needed. Stevenson correctly maintains that an empirical statement is empirically verifiable and that an ethical statement qua ethical is not. But he seems to make an illogical jump when he simply assumes that because an ethical statement is not empirically verifiable, neither is it true or false. Perhaps Prof. Stevenson reasoned in this manner: "If the meaning of a proposition is the method of its verification, and if verification has to be in terms of observation of sensible events, then clearly ethical propositions could not have meaning in this way . . . ."<sup>8</sup> For this reason, Prof. Stevenson uncovered the emotive meaning of ethical terms. But he fails to establish, at least to my satisfaction, the two hypothetical clauses. It would seem that the meaning of a proposition goes beyond the method of its verification, especially when the method of verification is so narrowly restricted to the observation of sensible events. The main point of criticism, however, rests on the fact that Prof. Stevenson seems to accept as proved assumptions which he does not justify. He accepts the hypothetical, at least implicitly, as factual, and then to save the meaningfulness of ethical terms he introduces emotive meaning.

At first it might seem surprising that Prof. Stevenson accepts such presuppositions. If we recall, however, his philosophical environment and upbringing, his blind acceptance of such assumptions is not strange at all. The assumptions

---

<sup>8</sup>Iris Murdoch, "Metaphysics and Ethics," The Nature of Metaphysics, ed. by D. F. Pears (London, 1957), p. 101.

belong to a certain epistemological and psychological framework which Prof. Stevenson accepts and builds upon. Therefore, to grasp the inadequacy of his superstructure it is necessary to consider Prof. Stevenson's epistemological and psychological presuppositions.

Let us summarize very briefly our remarks concerning the difference between an empirical and an ethical statement. We agree with Prof. Stevenson that to ask the difference between the two statements is a valid and meaningful question. His answer is what we object to. We object, not precisely to his answer, but to the stress that he places upon the difference between the two types of statements. In overstressing their difference Prof. Stevenson appears to run the risk of viewing the source of those statements as a duality. It seems that he fails to take into account that the person who makes the empirical statement is the same as that which makes the ethical statement. In his concern to keep the two types of statements separated, Prof. Stevenson presents his theory of belief and attitude, very closely akin to Hume's reason and passion, in which attitudes are blind, not specified by any object, but simply a matter of stimulus-response, cause-effect.

Such data might point to an inadequate concept of man on Prof. Stevenson's part. At any rate, it does point to a certain inadequacy in his method of linguistic analysis, and for that matter in linguistic analysis in general. The analyst concerns himself with words which are the outward expression of a man's interiority. Although the analyst does not stop at the words themselves, but is concerned with their meaning, that is, with their subjectivity, his method restricts him to viewing meaning or grasping meaning from the outside in. The method is similar to that of the behaviorist who studies man only as an object.

Stevenson studies words in this manner. This is valuable, but such a method runs the risk of neglecting the subjectivity of words, their interiority.

Since words are the verbal expression of man, they are very much a part of man, and an analysis of them as mere objects offers the same consequences as an analysis of man as a mere object offers. The picture that the analyst offers is incomplete. When man and man's language are considered merely as objects, and it seems that this has happened in Stevenson's theory, the basic unity of man disintegrates into a dualism.<sup>9</sup>

Concerning this dualism and the method of analysis that leads to it, we agree with Charner Perry that Ethics and Language has two defects. "The meaning of the basic terms used is never exactly or clearly determined and the correctness and adequacy of the initial schematism are uncritically assumed."<sup>10</sup> Stevenson's failure to distinguish between an analysis of meaning and an analysis of situation, according to some, points out the inadequacy of Stevenson's initial schematism. Such an inadequacy will show up in his patterns of analysis. Thus Hay suggests that the ". . . failure of this book to make explicit and constant distinction between these two would account for Stevenson's failure to see that his pattern will not give a correct analysis of the meaning of certain distinctively ethical sentences."<sup>11</sup> Thus the conclusion is reached that ". . . the main fault of the work is that the analysis is confused and inadequate."<sup>12</sup>

---

<sup>9</sup>See Bernard J. F. Lonergan, S. J., Insight (New York, 1957), p. 554.

<sup>10</sup>Perry, p. 209.

<sup>11</sup>W. H. Hay, "C. L. Stevenson and Ethical Analysis," The Philosophical Review, LVI (July 1947), p. 430.

<sup>12</sup>Perry, p. 209.

Prof. Stevenson's answer to the problem of the difference between an ethical and an empirical statement structures the "transit" problem, how to move from 'Is' to 'Ought'. His understanding of what makes a factual statement and what makes an evaluative statement predetermines the answer. Logically speaking, an imperative of some sort has to be present in the factual statement if the conclusion is to be imperative. But since an ethical term as ethical is constituted by emotive meaning, this emotive meaning assumes the role of a quasi-imperative. Because "This is good" contains emotive meaning, that is, a quasi-imperative, a conclusion, such as "So this" logically follows. Thus Stevenson answers the problem.

Is the answer adequate? Or rather is the problem adequate? Is it meaningful to ask how one proceeds from 'Is' to 'Ought'? Someone might object that Prof. Stevenson is asking a more complex question: Given the proposition "This is good," how do I logically conclude that I ought to do this? An imperative does not appear anywhere in the statement except in the conclusion. Thus from a factual statement, "This is good," an ethical statement is deduced. Stevenson maintains that in such a case an imperative is present but hidden in the ethical term 'good'. This hidden imperative Stevenson analyzes out in terms of emotive meaning.

But is such the case? Does every 'good' upon analysis yield an emotive meaning and thereby a quasi-imperative? If every 'good' does, then whatever is good must be done. According to Stevenson every 'good' implicitly includes an imperative and yet no one would admit that in time of war, during a battle, a soldier ought to go above and beyond the call of duty. Yet everyone admits that such an action is 'good'. Thus it would seem that Stevenson's analysis inade-

quately explains the case in which something is 'good', and yet does not of necessity imply an ought.

In those other cases in which a 'good' does imply an 'ought' because failure to perform the good would involve an evil, is it necessary to suppose that the 'good' includes the hidden imperative in terms of emotive meaning? Need the imperative be hidden in the term 'good'? It need not be. The imperative can be hidden in a clause that has been suppressed. Given the proposition "This is good," and by 'good' in this context I mean morally good and good in the sense that failure to do it would be evil, I can logically conclude that I ought to do this, since I have an implicit understanding (although in this case I have not stated it as the major premise) that "I ought to do good and avoid evil." Such an approach need not rely upon emotive meaning and yet the same results are obtained.

We can conclude, therefore, with regard to the logical problem that Prof. Stevenson's acceptance of the basic, logical problem is valid and meaningful. His solution, although it offers many insights into the nature of ethical disputes, for the reasons stated, appears to suffer from certain inadequacies.

Likewise, since the foundation and fundamental solution is inadequate, the bridge that Prof. Stevenson throws up between 'Is' and 'Ought' is inadequate. Stevenson's analysis finds an imperative where there is none and overlooks one that he fails to express.

In order clearly to catch the inadequacies of Prof. Stevenson's approach, we leave the plain of the logical and move on to that of the epistemological-psychological. Like most other sciences, logic presupposes certain epistemolog-

ical-psychological positions. A consideration of these positions in relation to Prof. Stevenson will clarify much of what has been said in regard to the logical problem.

As an introduction to the problem the distinction between science and ethics needs elucidation. This is one place where Stevenson differs from his grand benefactor, John Dewey. On this point Dewey criticizes Stevenson, for by separating science and ethics, he maintains, Stevenson is led to introduce the non-cognitive into ethical matters.<sup>13</sup> Like most ethicists, Dewey wants to make ethics a cognitive matter. "Discussion has accordingly focused upon the alternative possibilities of reducing ethics to a science, thus saving its pretensions to rationality, or of accepting the consequence that our commitments to norms not only may, but must, be nonrational."<sup>14</sup> As is clear by this time, although he does not exclude from ethical discussion the place of supporting reasons, Stevenson maintains that our commitments to norms must be nonrational since an ethical conclusion cannot logically (rationally) be inferred from empirical premises.<sup>15</sup>

Such a view of the ethical situation entails certain consequences. By introducing the nonrational into ethical discussion, Stevenson lessens the possi-

---

<sup>13</sup>John Dewey, "Ethical Subject-Matter and Language," The Journal of Philosophy, XLII (Dec. 20, 1945), pp. 701-712. Dewey does agree that ethical issues differ from scientific ones and that careful attention to the way in which they differ is needed. He disagrees when Stevenson adds the nonrational as the way.

<sup>14</sup>Warner M. Wick, "Moral Problems, Moral Philosophy, and Metaethics: Some Further Dogmas of Empiricism," The Philosophical Review, LXII (Jan. 1953), p. 5.

<sup>15</sup>EL, p. 155.

bility of setting down criteria for determining whether one ethical decision be better than another. In an ethical situation in which the conclusion is rationally inferred from premises, the better decision is the decision flowing from true premises and a valid inference. But what criteria can be offered for determining the worthiness of an ethical decision if the decision hangs on emotive meaning, and therefore cannot be rationally inferred? Is not this the reason why the methodological analyst cannot say that such and such a decision is better than some other? This is the reason that the distinction is made between normative ethics and meta-ethics. We considered this distinction earlier, but now we see it in a clearer light.

As a meta-ethician, Stevenson merely describes and clarifies. Thus in his role he must restrict himself to making merely descriptive judgments. As a meta-ethician, he cannot say that one ethical decision is better than another, and as a meta-ethician it is not necessary that he do so. The point, however, is that, although as a meta-ethician Stevenson need not decide whether one ethical decision be better than another, as a would-be normative ethicist (even if at some future date) he must decide. And given his position, it would seem that he cannot rationally say that one ethical decision is better than another. He has to attempt to direct our attitudes in one direction or another, since besides being a matter of beliefs, the establishing of one ethical decision as better than another is also a matter of attitudes. It is easy to see that such an approach can go on ad infinitum. Attitudes are blind, neither true nor false. Thus, in this nonrational set-up, there are no criteria for a choice. It is for this reason that

Many philosophers not only believe that it is not the special concern of the moral philosophers to say what things are good or what actions we should perform; they have also assumed that the acceptance of a proposed analysis of ethical concepts has no implications at all for first order moral attitudes. The latter stand on their own legs. If I were to reject an intuitionist meta-ethics to which I had been committed previously and were suddenly to turn emotivist, my moral life could remain just what it was before the change, without any absurdity. I could be for and against the same things, present the same arguments, and in all respects, other than the way in which I talk about these procedures, remain morally unchanged. No logical connection would obtain between any set of first-order moral views and any second-order analysis of the formal structure of moral discourse.<sup>16</sup>

Stevenson is among these philosophers who maintain that their meta-ethical theory has no logical connection with any set of normative decisions. The question to ask is: Does the acceptance of Stevenson's meta-ethical theory affect our first-order moral life? If it does, then it might well be the case that Prof Stevenson's analysis is inadequate, that ethics of the normative variety is not nonrational as he proposes, and that there is a logical connection between man's first and second-order moral life.

It seems that the acceptance of Stevenson's meta-ethical theory does affect our first-order moral life. This effect is observable ". . . in a subtle modification of our procedures of moral judgment. . . it occurs precisely because the theory is not merely an explication of our ordinary use of ethical words."<sup>17</sup> Stevenson's theory is such. From the moment that Stevenson proposes agreement or disagreement in attitude as the distinctive mark of an ethical decision, he has gone beyond the bounds of meta-ethics and steps into the arena of normative

---

<sup>16</sup>Frederick A. Olafson, "Meta-ethics and the Moral Life," The Philosophical Review, LXV (April 1956), p. 159.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 160.



ethics. It is true that nowhere does he say what a man ought to do in this or that particular situation, but he has structured the ethical situation in terms of feelings and emotions. In subtly modifying our ordinary procedures of formulating ethical judgments, Stevenson's methodology does affect our first-order moral life. Stevenson's meta-ethics, like most, is not just a characterization of the logical peculiarities of moral statements. Or rather, because it is that, it is also a description of a certain kind of human activity. And since the conscious agent who forms the moral judgment and embraces the meta-ethical theory is one and the same, a performatory analysis of moral statements generates a performatory moral life.

We have seen how Prof. Stevenson approaches the meaning of ethical terms from the side of belief and attitude, emotive and descriptive meaning, use and objectivity. Another approach to the meaning of ethical terms is that of human consciousness. Fundamentally, the meaning of ethical terms is founded on moral self-consciousness. Such an approach does not overlook the emotions, but also does not let itself be restricted to the emotional level. Thus ". . . while we grant that moral self-consciousness has a concomitant in moral emotions and moral sentiments, and while we agree that these emotions and sentiments have a psychoneural basis and are subject to psychoneural aberration, we contend that it is a blunder to confuse these concomitants with moral self-consciousness itself."<sup>18</sup> Since we are not setting down a theory of our own but merely trying to evaluate Prof. Stevenson's, we mention the approach only in passing. Yet such

---

<sup>18</sup>Lonergan, p. 600. For an example of Stevenson's behavioristic leanings see p. 63 text and footnote 20 of Ethics and Language.

a passing indication rests on the need presented by the inadequacy of Stevenson's approach in which in behavioristic fashion he neglects rational self-consciousness without which there could be no ethics at all.

We are led next to a consideration of Prof. Stevenson's epistemology. The connection between ethics and epistemology is obvious. "Ethics and epistemology are always very closely related, and if we want to understand our ethics we must look at our epistemology."<sup>19</sup> What is Stevenson's epistemology? It is very closely linked to that of Hume. Thus, it is pointed out that "Stevenson is squarely in the tradition of Hume, and thus a moral skeptic . . . ."<sup>20</sup> His view of the world matches that of Hume, He has derived his philosophical tendency to "... . see the world in terms of contingently conjoined simples, to see it as a totality of ultimate simple facts which have no necessary connection with each other."<sup>21</sup> Therefore, since the world is a world of unconnected simples, no universal order is possible. For this reason ethics cannot be in terms of intelligible structures and orders. So Hume places ethics in the realm of passions and moral sentiment and Stevenson in the realm of emotive meaning and attitudes.

By this time it is obvious that the inadequacies in Prof. Stevenson's system flow from his psychology or lack thereof. This lack of a full-grown psycho-

---

<sup>19</sup>Murdoch, p. 113.

<sup>20</sup>Mary Mothersill, "Moral Knowledge," The Journal of Philosophy, LVI (Sept. 10, 1959), p. 756.

<sup>21</sup>Murdoch, p. 113. An example of Stevenson's view of the world in terms of unconnected simples might be his presentation of meaning in terms of dispositional property in which signs are looked upon as isolated, single units.

logy does not limit itself to Prof. Stevenson. The greater majority of the analytic philosophers must admit it. For this reason Miss Anscombe maintains that ". . . it is not profitable for us at present to do moral philosophy; that should be laid aside at any rate until we have an adequate philosophy of psychology, in which we are conspicuously lacking."<sup>22</sup> Such an inadequacy accounts for many of the other shortcomings of Prof. Stevenson's presentation.

One further comment is needed. A pivotal point of Stevenson's theory is his notion of agreement and disagreement. He very definitely preoccupies himself with exactly how ethical disagreements can be solved. His analysis uncovers ways of bringing agreement into ethical disputes. But there are other ways of doing this than resolving disagreement in attitudes to disagreements in beliefs. One way is to recognize that "ultimately, all systems of ethics start from certain fundamental assumptions, and unless two men agree on the same assumption there is no way of removing differences of opinion. But a community in which free inquiry into moral issues is allowed, is bound to discover more stable bases of moral judgments and conduct, just as free discussion in the field of natural sciences is bound to eliminate arbitrary opinions. For so long as men live in a common world and have common elements of human nature, their choices and judgments will agree in proportion as they are enlightened and recognize this common nature."<sup>23</sup>

---

<sup>22</sup>G. E. M. Anscombe, "Modern Moral Philosophy," Philosophy, XXXIII (Jan. 1958), 1.

<sup>23</sup>Morris R. Cohen and Ernest Nagel, An Introduction to Logic and Scientific Method (New York, 1934), p. 366.

In such a view disagreement can be resolved by rational means and rational enlightenment and growth. Stevenson's analysis seems to overlook this type of resolution and in so doing points out a certain inadequacy in the analysis.

This brings to a close our evaluation of Prof. Stevenson. We have found certain inadequacies in his methodology, theory, and assumptions. Stevenson's methodology as behavioristic is inadequate to deal with man, man's language, and man's ethical decisions subjectively. Its use leads Prof. Stevenson to view the relation of the ethical and the empirical inadequately as if they were totally unrelated. It also leads to an inadequate conception of meaning qua meaning and of the types of meaning. The methodology itself is founded on assumptions which are inadequate, such as assuming that true knowledge is what can be empirically verified, that reason is essentially passive and the emotions active, and similar assumptions. But merely pointing to these inadequacies and failing to recognize Stevenson's contribution would itself be an inadequacy. At a time when a score of his colleagues were giving up ethical and moral philosophy as hopeless and meaningless, Prof. Stevenson pushed on investigations which, because they were extremely specialized, ran the risk of appearing a waste of time. At a time when many a philosopher from another tradition lazily spewed forth ambiguous ethical terms of all sorts, Prof. Stevenson set himself the task of clarifying ethical terminology. By such a method he stirred those of other traditions also to have more concern about the clarity of language. His analysis also points up the place of attitudes and emotions in the ethical situations. In general the chief value of his work rests in pointing out the very real complexity of making ethical decisions and resolving ethical disagreement. This complexity all ethicists must admit.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

### I. PRIMARY SOURCES

Stevenson, Charles L. Ethics and Language. New Haven, 1944.

----- "Brandt's Question about Emotive Ethics," The Philosophical Review, LIX (Oct. 1950), 528-534.

----- "The Emotive Conception of Ethics and Its Cognitive Implications," The Philosophical Review, LIX (July 1950), 291-304.

----- "The Emotive Meaning of Ethical Terms," Mind, XLVI (Jan. 1937), 14-31.

----- "Ethical Judgment and Avoidability," Mind, XLVII (Jan. 1938), 45-57.

----- "Ethics by P. H. Nowell-Smith," Mind, LXIV (July 1955), 405-410.

----- "Meaning: Descriptive and Emotive," The Philosophical Review, LVII (March 1948), 127-144.

----- "Persuasive Definitions," Mind, XLVII (July 1938), 331-350.

### II. SECONDARY SOURCES

#### A. Books

Albert, Ethel M. Great Traditions in Ethics. New York, 1963.

Ayer, Alfred Jules. Language, Truth and Logic. London, 1936.

----- Philosophical Essays. London, 1954.

Broad, C. D. Five Types of Ethical Theory. London, 1944.

Edwards, Paul. The Logic of Moral Discourse. Glencoe, Ill., 1955.

Erikerian, Yervant H. Contemporary Philosophic Problems. New York, 1969.

Harrod, Roy. Foundations of Inductive Logic. London, 1956.

- Hare, Richard M. The Language of Morals. Oxford, 1962.
- Hospers, John. An Introduction to Philosophical Analysis. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1953.
- Hume, David. An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding. Edited by D. C. Yalden-Thomson. London, 1951.
- A Treatise of Human Nature. London, 1949.
- Hume's Moral and Political Philosophy. Edited by Henry David Aiken. New York, 1948.
- Jarret, James L. Contemporary Philosophy. New York, 1954.
- Johnson, Oliver A. Ethics. New York, 1958.
- Lonergan, Bernard J. P. Insight. New York, 1957.
- MacNabb, D. G. C. David Hume: His Theory of Knowledge and Morality. London, 1951.
- Moore, George E. Principia Ethica. London, 1948.
- White, Alan R. G. E. Moore: A Critical Exposition. Oxford, 1958.
- White, Morton Gabriel. The Age of Analysis. Boston, 1955.
- Toward a Reunion in Philosophy. Cambridge, Mass., 1956.

#### B. ARTICLES

- Aiken, Henry D. "Ethics and Language," The Journal of Philosophy, XLII (August 16, 1945), 455-470.
- Ansecombe, G. E. M. "Modern Moral Philosophy," Philosophy, XXXIII (January 1958), 455-470.
- Atkinson, R. F. "'Ought' and 'Is'," Philosophy, XXXIII (January, 1958), 29-49.
- Brandt, Richard B. "The Emotive Theory of Ethics," The Philosophical Review, LIX (July 1950), 305-318.
- Dewey, John. "Ethical Subject-Matter and Language," The Journal of Philosophy, XLII (Dec. 20, 1945), 701-712.
- Frankena, William K. "Moral Philosophy at Mid-Century," The Philosophical Review, LX (January 1951), 44-55.

- Hall, Everett W. "Stevenson on Disagreement in Attitude," Ethics, LVIII (October 1947), 51-65.
- Hay, W. H. "C. L. Stevenson and Ethical Analysis," The Philosophical Review, LVI (July 1947), 422-430.
- Meyerhoff, Hans. "Emotive and Existentialist Theories of Ethics," The Journal of Philosophy, XLVIII (Dec. 6, 1951), 769-783.
- Moore, Asher. "Emotivism: Theory and Practice," The Journal of Philosophy, LV (April 24, 1958), 375-382.
- Mothersill, Mary. "Moral Knowledge," The Journal of Philosophy, LVI (September 10, 1959), 755-763.
- Murdoch, Iris. "Metaphysics and Ethics," The Nature of Metaphysics. Edited by D. F. Pears. London, 1967.
- Nowell-Smith, P. H. "Ethics: C. L. Stevenson," Mind, LXIV (July 1955), 405-409.
- Olafson, Frederick A. "Meta-ethics and the Moral Life," The Philosophical Review, LXV (April 1956), 159-178.
- Pap, Arthur. "Reply to Dewey's 'Ethical Subject-Matter and Language,'" The Journal of Philosophy, XLIII (July 18, 1946), 412-414.
- Perry, Charner. "Sound Ethics and Confused Language," Ethics, LV (October 1944), 209-215.
- Wick, Warner A. "Moral Problems, Moral Philosophy, and Metaethics: Some Further Dogmas of Empiricism," The Philosophical Review, LXII (January 1953), 3-22.
- Zink, Sidney. "Methodological Guidance and Ethical Detachment," The Philosophical Review, LXI (April 1952), 226-232.

APPROVAL SHEET

The thesis submitted by **Leo Peter Cachat, S.J.,**  
has been read and approved by three members of the Department of  
Philosophy.

The final copies have been examined by the director of the  
thesis and the signature which appears below verifies the fact  
that any necessary changes have been incorporated, and that the  
thesis is now given final approval with reference to content,  
form, and mechanical accuracy.

The thesis is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

Nov 23 1960  
Date

Thomas H. Simpson  
Signature of Adviser